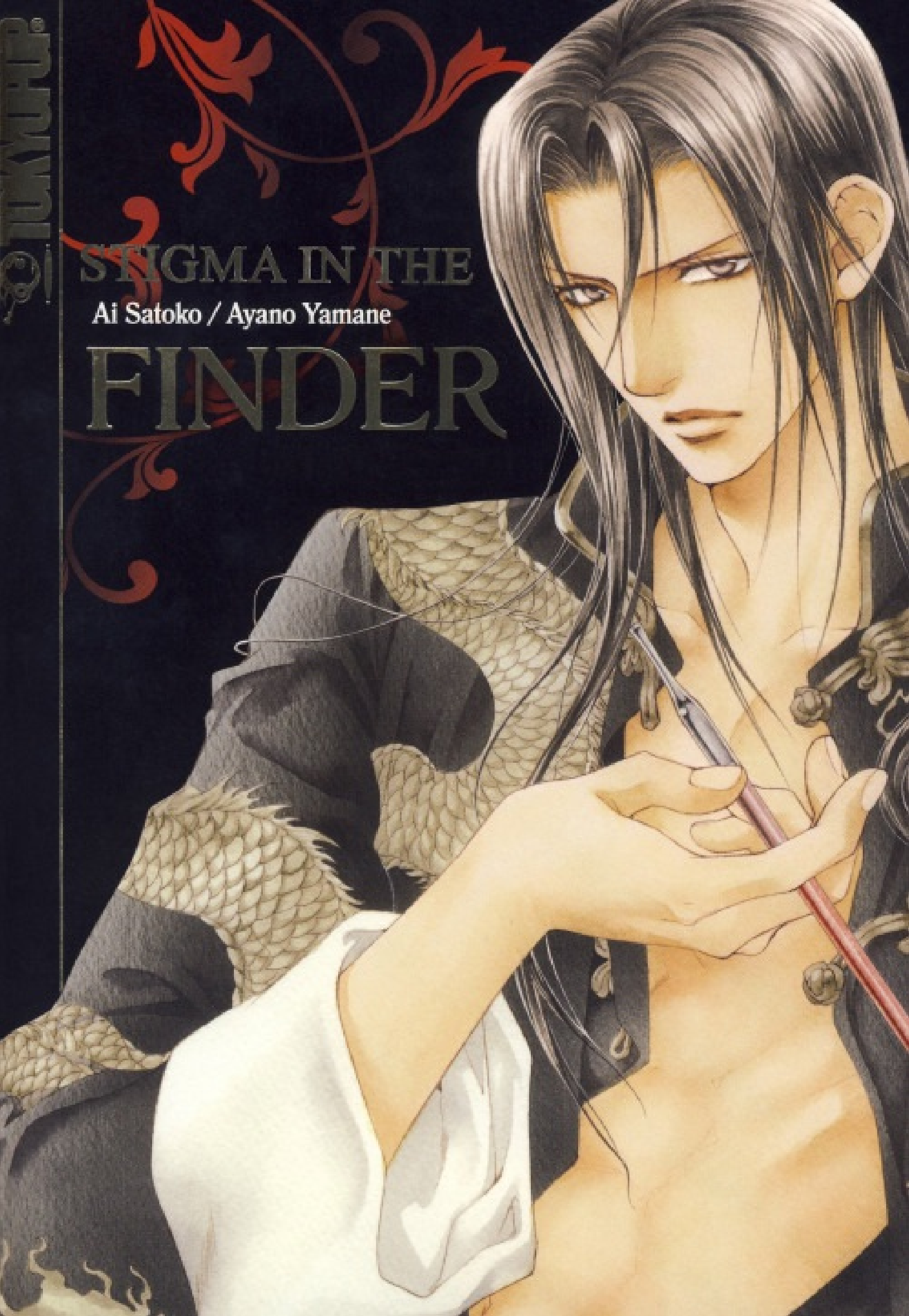


TOKYOPOP

STIGMA IN THE

Ai Satoko / Ayano Yamane

FINDER



SHOGAKUHAN

STIGMA IN THE

Ai Satoko / Ayano Yamane

FINDER

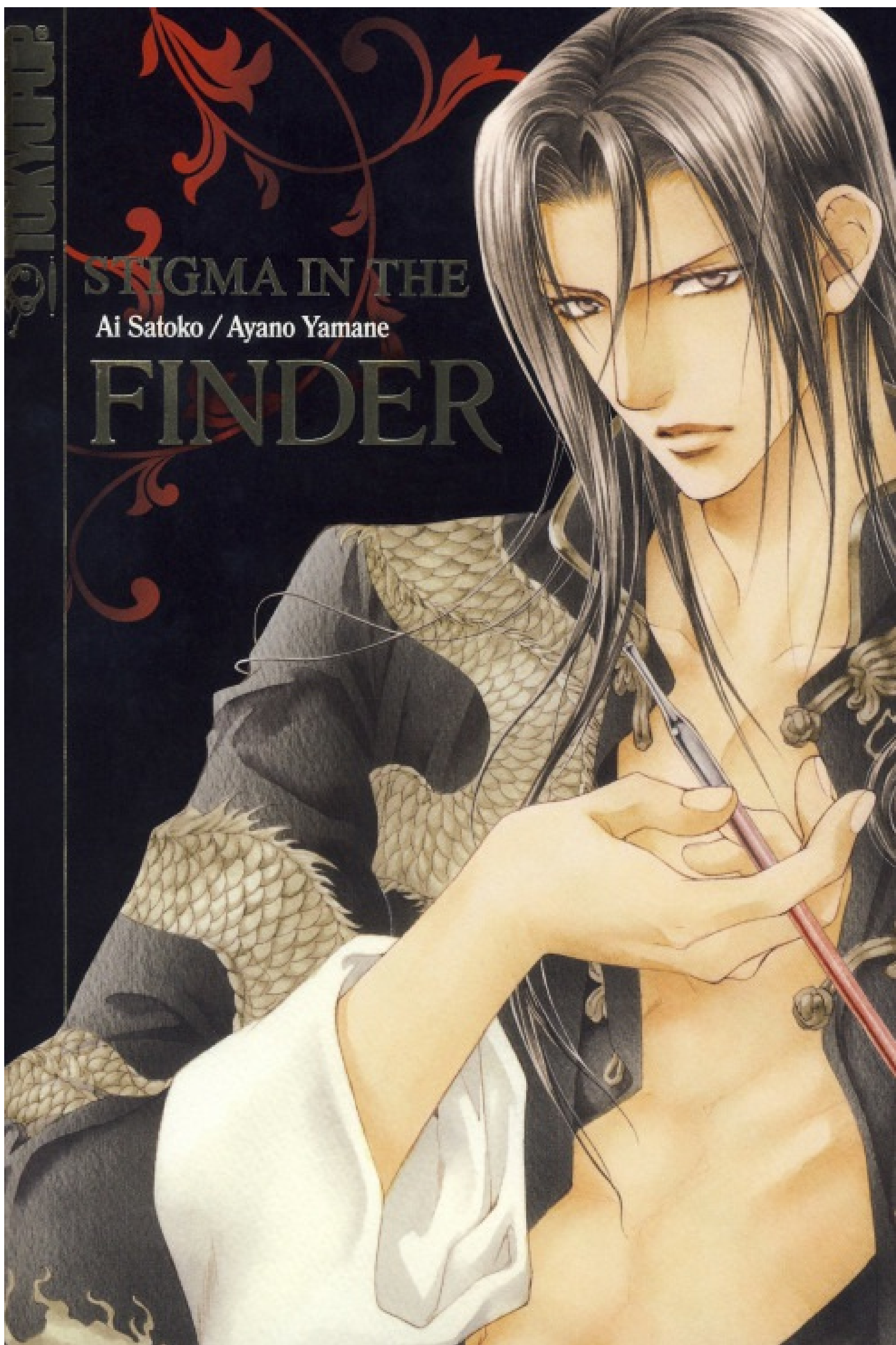


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Stigma in the Finder I (Finder no Rakuin)

Hey everyone! :) So this is my shot at an English translation of the light novel *Finder no Rakuin* by Satoko Ai based on Yamane Ayano's yaoi manga *You're my Loveprize in Viewfinder*. Before it starts, I just wanted to say a few things.

First of all, I'm no professional, and I did this for the mere fun of it and to share it with those people who haven't had a chance to read the novel yet. It's also the first time I've done something like this, so please don't be too hard on me. (´_`)

It was a lot of work, but I had a blast doing it, and I want to thank my amazing proofreaders, Felver and [Scheming Rabbit](#), for being such a great help and putting up with my perfectionism... really, thank you guys so much. ♥

I also want to point out that this is a translation of the German version of the novel, since I neither own the original nor speak Japanese – I have no idea how accurate that version is to begin with, but at times it is kinda strange, so I did my best to stick as close to it as possible while also taking some liberties so as to make it sound better. In terms of the names, I went with the Asian name order, meaning last name comes first, first name comes last, and I also spelled the names the way they were in the book. (The only exception is Mikhail... they called him 'Michel Albatof', and let's face it, that doesn't sound half as epic as *Mikhail Arrrbatov*. :3)

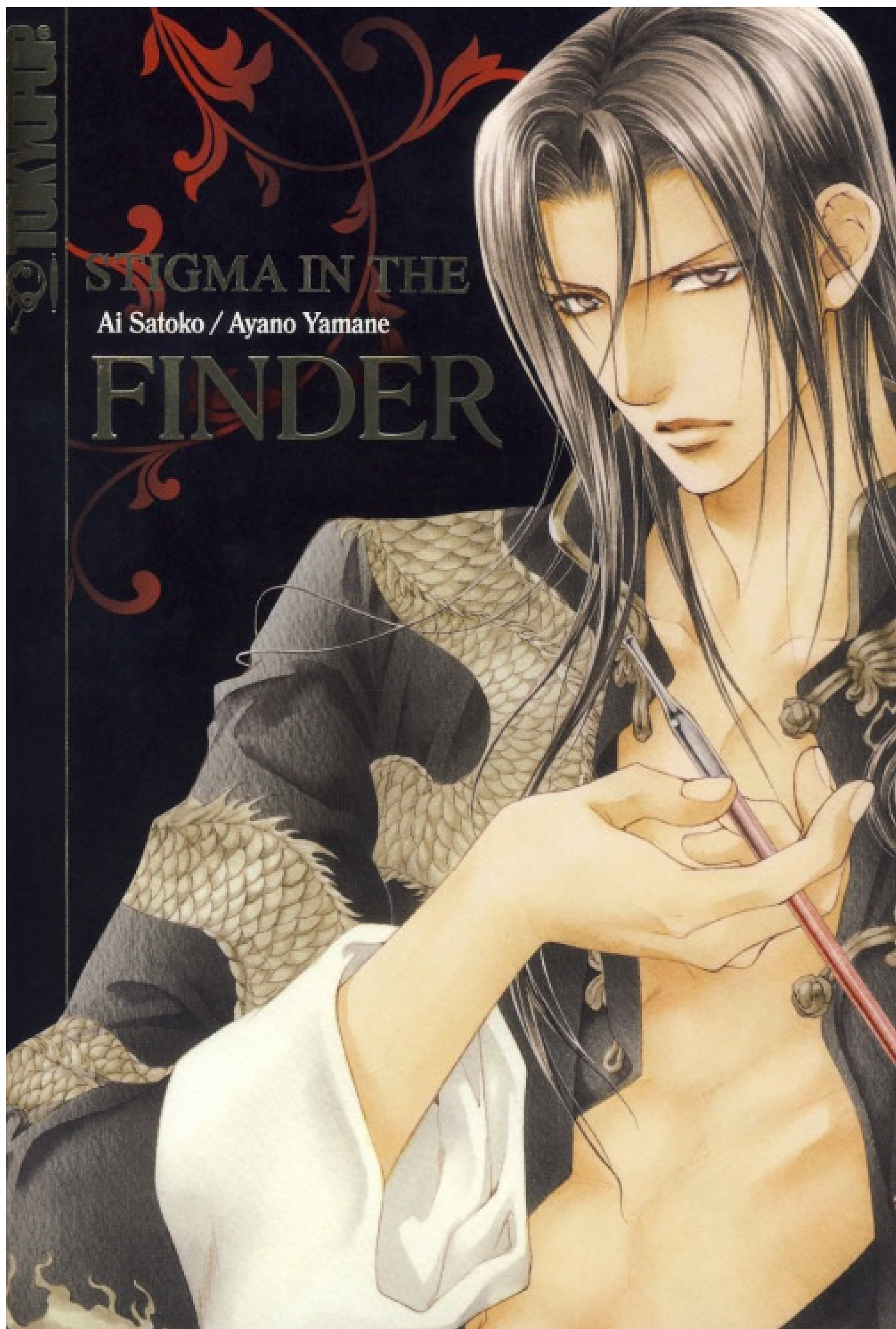
And of course this contains mature content (18+). ;)

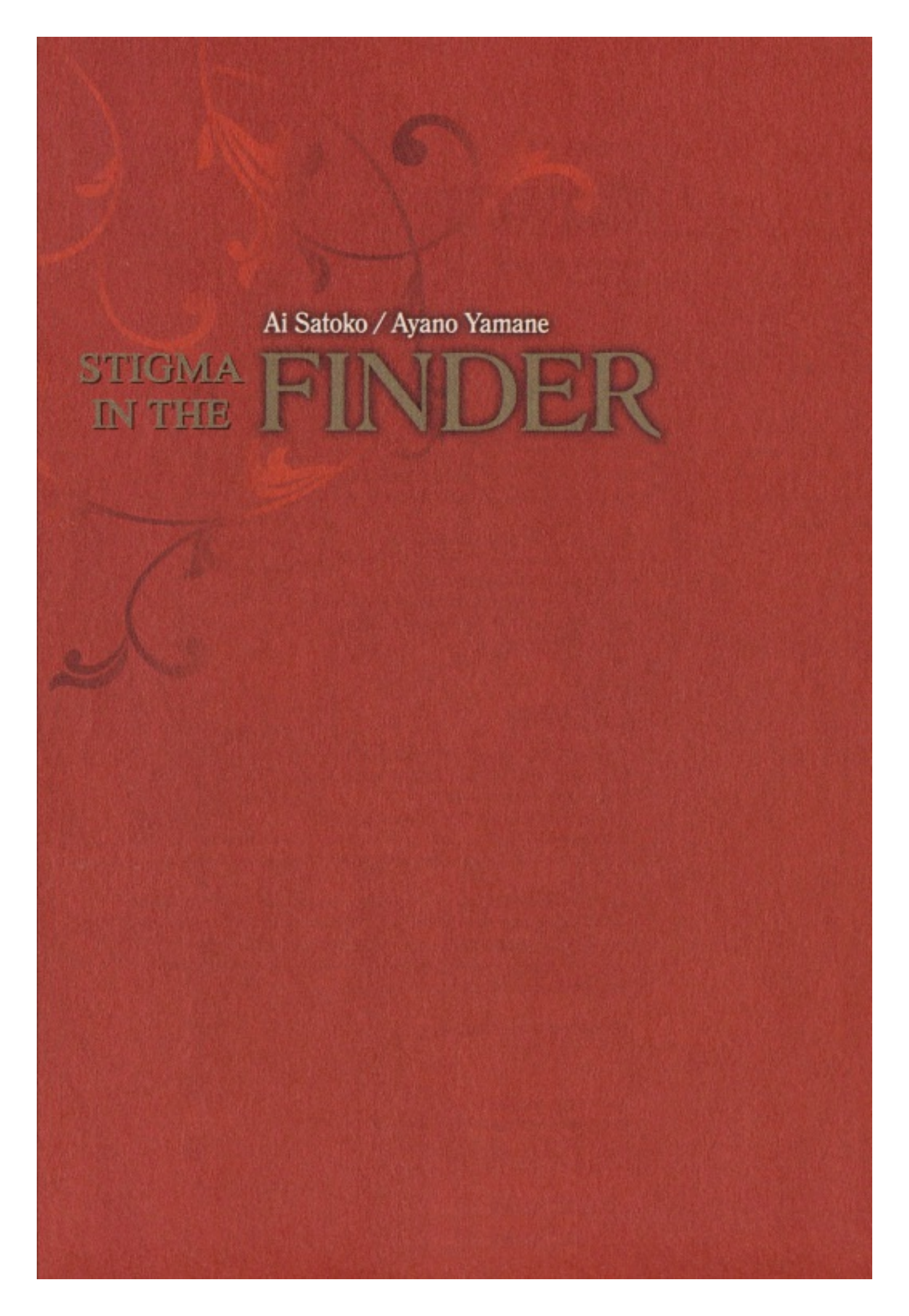
Well, I think that was long enough... with all that said, please enjoy! ^__^

SHOGAKUHAN

STIGMA IN THE FINDER

Ai Satoko / Ayano Yamane





Ai Satoko / Ayano Yamane

STIGMA
IN THE **FINDER**



The nights in Taiwan are filled with temptations and allure.

The modern country is dotted with skyscrapers; crowds of people and vehicles worm their way through the narrow streets. However, if you depart from the main road, an intimate townscape opens up, scattered with old mausoleums and temples – a sight that lives up to the second name of Taiwan, the illustrious bird.

In a corner of those tangled alleyways is a marketplace where there is hustle and bustle all night. The stalls, also called Lubiantan, stand brightly lit in the hubbub as if there was a festival at all times. In these shopping streets, which are visited by many tourists as well, various different languages aside from the Asian ones are spoken, and the aroma of food mingles with the oppressive sultriness.

At a food stand of this nightly market, a guest rose from his seat. His wallet in his hand, he called into the kitchen, “I’d like to pay, please!”

On the menu of the shop run by a taciturn elderly married couple were the usual dishes, like noodles with beef, or minced meat and rice.

“I’ll come again,” he said. After having paid, he left the shop, stepping over the old mongrel at the exit. Woken by the loud cry of thanks from the shop owner, the dozing dog lifted his head and sleepily wagged his tail. He yawned and panted, his fat belly wrinkling up. It was only in the rarest of cases that this thoroughly human-loving dog barked. The guest disappeared, and the loud sizzle of the oil seething in the pots sounded. Thereupon, the dog laid his head back on his forepaws. He gazed after the people walking past him and slowly fell asleep again. A day like any other in this shop.

A short time later, the back door of the kitchen opened and a young man loaded with garbage bags stepped outside. He seemed to belong to the staff; in addition to his ordinary outfit composed of a polo shirt and cotton pants, he wore the white apron of the shop around his hips. As opposed to the lighted, noisy side of the street, the back side of the shop was isolated and deserted. As if the man were merging with the subtropical, humid air, he hurried forward with a hunched back. In his demeanor he resembled a cat, with his soundless stride and his inky black hair.

He went directly to the giant garbage containers and threw the trash inside in one skillful movement. Together with a loud crash, a biting smell of something

rotting reached his nostrils. The shop was obviously thriving, as the container was filled with kitchen waste. Once he finished, the man sighed briefly and took off his apron, then casually tucked it under his arm and paused next to the running ventilator. Before returning into the shop, he apparently wanted to allow himself a smoke break. He leaned his back against the wall and put the cigarette he had just pulled out of his pocket into his mouth. As he looked up, his hair, which had covered his face before, fell to the side so that narrow eyes were revealed through a gap. Glimmering sparks were reflected in his dark eyes like bright lightning. A red glow lit up the darkness like a firefly, and with a pleased sigh he took a slow pull on his cigarette. But at this very moment, his breath faltered; he noticed another person was there. His senses suddenly were on alert.

“So this is where you are prowling around, Yoh?” a voice sounded.

Slowly, a silhouette loomed up. When the man who had just been referred to as Yoh recognized the figure appearing out of thin air, the cigarette quietly fell from his mouth to the ground. The ambient noise seemed to lapse into silence and the apron soundlessly slipped from his arm.

“Long time no see,” the silhouette continued. “Did you lose weight?”

The person laughed quietly as though they were poking fun at him. It was a man with a tall, slender build. His hoodie, which made him look like one of the teenagers from around the area, was probably supposed to serve the purpose of not attracting attention. The hood hung so low that his face was not recognizable, yet his long hair peeking out from under it gave him away, as well as his calm way of speaking.

“Master... Feilong...” Yoh pressed out while staying nestled to the wall and clenching his now sweaty hands.

Liu Feilong. Officially he posed as a successful businessman from Hong Kong, but covertly he was the young head of the drug syndicate Baishe, which was not only spread in China but throughout all of Asia. He was known for controlling the underworld of Hong Kong, but he rarely acted personally. Only a few months ago, Yoh had still been commanded by Feilong.

“Who would have thought that you’d do such lowly work in Taiwan after you

disappeared from my side.”

With his slim fingers, Feilong seized the rim of his hood and let it slide onto his shoulders. In the twilight, a pale face appeared.



It had been a long time since Yoh had last seen those cold, beautiful features. This unaltered graceful appearance made him swallow. He had not thought he would ever see Feilong again. With this getup, who would realize that in reality this man, whose appearance fused with the dark, was the boss of the Baishe? Despite his bafflement, Yoh stayed at a safe distance from Feilong and looked at him.

“What is it, Yoh? You look as if you’ve seen a ghost.” Feilong came to a halt before him, smiling.

Yoh gathered his wits together and finally found his voice again. “It’s nothing... I just hadn’t expected to meet you here.”

When he noticed smoke rising from underneath his feet, he ground the cigarette under his heel. The two men were facing each other. A tepid wind blew through the alley and rippled their hair in the breeze.

“I could say the same to you. You can’t tell me Asami wouldn’t have taken you under his wing.”

Asami Ryuichi – a mediator who pulled the strings in the background of the Japanese politics and economy. The memory of the fateful fight on board the casino ship was still rather fresh; the Russian mafia had also been involved in the incident. After Chou snatched away the haul of a big drug deal from under the Baishe’s nose, he fled to Japan. That had been the beginning of all disputes. Feilong followed him to Japan and managed to eliminate Chou, who in turn had asked Asami to smuggle him into Europe. But immediately thereafter, a shootout occurred between the mediator, Asami, and the head of the Baishe, Feilong. Feilong wounded Asami, and in spite of his own injury he abducted Asami’s lover, who had been present at the gunfight as well, to Hong Kong. The name of the lover was Takaba Akihito, a photographer. To win him back, Asami held the deeds of ownership to the casino, stolen from Feilong’s hand, as leverage. Takaba eventually made Feilong agree to the bargain, and a luxury casino ship on the sea of Hong Kong was supposed to be the scene of negotiations. But the Russian mafia, smelling money and power, had taken part in the debate, and for a moment, the deck of the ship had turned into a bloody show of war. Eventually, Feilong traded Takaba for the deeds and everything came to a close,

but it had not gone unnoticed by Feilong that Yoh had, in the background, had a hand in this. For seven years he had played Feilong's loyal man, but in truth he had been smuggled into the Baishe on behalf of the Japanese adversary Asami, to supervise every one of Feilong's movements. When the latter learned that his subordinate, whom he had trusted, was in reality Asami's spy, he had fumed with rage. Yoh knew of Feilong's hidden temper and gulped.

"And what are you doing here now? Are you going to get rid of me?"

The punishment for traitors was gruesome. When Yoh's breach of fidelity against Feilong had been uncovered, he had been captured by the Baishe and put in the pillory for high treason. But he had not been able to die yet, not before having brought back Takaba to Asami's side undamaged. Otherwise the previous seven years would have been for nothing. Driven by his duty, he had managed to free himself from captivity and taken advantage of the disturbances to go to Takaba Akihito's rescue. It was proof of having been Asami's loyal subordinate for seven years, and at the same time probably penance for having deceived Feilong for such a long time. But that had not been his only thoughts. If he were to die anyway, he had wanted to lay his fate into Feilong's hands, for after things had straightened out, it had been in his power to decide about Yoh's life; however, he had not delivered his verdict. What had been going on inside Feilong, who now held the deeds in his hands, had not interested Yoh. He fled from the deck of the ship unnoticed, distanced himself from the Baishe, and left for Taiwan on his own. With the help of a few connections, he mixed with the people of the nightly market and was now working there as an employee at a food stand. But even now it was still mostly contract killings that kept his head above the water. No matter where one was, one would first get a foot in the door of shady characters. It was not so easy to whitewash oneself, even after turning one's back on an organization.

"What is the meaning of your coming here? You hardly would have come to merely greet me."

Feilong's eyes flared up at this question. "Are you intrigued?"

A mafia don had many enemies. Unless it was really serious business, he would only leave the house accompanied by subordinates. And now he was standing here, in plain clothing, merging with the darkness. The assumption that

something was wrong immediately suggested itself.

“I wonder what you’re doing here, entirely without company...”

Although Yoh did not want to admit it to himself, he could not fully conceal the fact that Feilong’s current situation piqued his curiosity. Actually, a traitor should not care about something like that. He did not know what kind of mood had driven Feilong to overlook his treachery, but he knew how merciless he could be. During the seven years under his command, he had witnessed what terrible and brutal things he ordered his men to do without batting an eye. If someone let himself be deluded by his outward beauty and forgot the hidden poison inside of Feilong, a bitter lesson was waiting.

Without increasing the distance, he answered Yoh’s question. “Didn’t it cross your mind that I came to see you?”

“Never. How conceited do you think I am?” Yoh replied promptly, although it would have been a lie to say that he had not thought of that possibility at all when he had seen Feilong before him right now. Feilong was by all means capable of understanding the feelings of others, but he was not sentimental. It would not surprise Yoh either if he had looked for him to take his life on a whim – an opportunity that he had let slip on the ship. After everything that had happened, Yoh would not shed a tear for his life, but Feilong’s visit had come so suddenly that he could not suppress his disquiet.

Now he took a step towards him. Yoh was prepared and lowered his gaze. As he sensed Feilong’s hand on his shoulder, the mafia leader quietly breathed into his ear, “Will you understand if I tell you... I want you to kill someone for me?”

Yoh’s eyes widened, and he looked at Feilong. Including the lowest ranks, the Baishe had members in all of Asia; no matter where around the world one should hide, it was a simple task for the Baishe to search out the whereabouts. Therefore, it was no wonder Feilong knew about his dark sideline. However...

“Wait! Why are you asking me?!”

“You want to hear a reason?”

“If the boss of the Baishe personally comes to Taiwan undercover to kill a specific target, I am the wrong contact person for you.”

“Only you can carry out this task.”

Those words reverberated in Yoh’s heart in a strangely pleasant way. And yet his confusion did not disappear. He could not recall knowing even one target for which only he could be assigned. All of Feilong’s underlings were faithful, excellent men; they could almost be called blind with loyalty. One word from him was enough and they would just simply annihilate any nuisance, howsoever small it may be. But here he stood, having especially traveled all the way from Hong Kong. Yoh stared at Feilong with an inquiring look. “Who is it?” he then asked.

“I will only give that away after you have accepted my mission.” His answer came without hesitation, but it was not exactly satisfying. Was the subject a person he could not simply name, or was there another, special reason for his reserve? Yoh did not trust the matter, so he tried to get behind the true intentions of the other man.

“Please excuse me, but don’t you think this is the wrong order? What if I refuse?”

He did not belong with the Baishe anymore. Whether he accepted the mission or not was entirely up to his discretion. And yet Feilong nodded to him in utter confidence.

“You won’t reject. No, you can’t reject... Yoh... will you do it for me?”

Just like on that day, Feilong’s bleak, demanding gaze pierced him. It was not the first time that he gave him the order to put a troublemaker out of the way. Inside him, the memories from seven years ago surfaced vividly. When he had met Feilong in the Hong Kong prison, his eyes had been soulless. Yoh had infiltrated the prison to monitor and protect Feilong by Asami’s order, but he had asked himself whether that had been necessary at all. Feilong had lost his organization as well as his own flesh and blood; he could not return to anyone and had just barely escaped death. Even if his wounds healed after some time, a scar would probably remain. However, as it had come to Feilong’s ears that the former number three of the Baishe was tempted to rebuild the organization and make contact with Asami, the sleeping dragon inside him had awoken again.

“I have to ensure that this man disappears from the picture. Yoh... will you do

that for me?” Feilong had commanded. He had not even cared about the assassin they had sent after him. Ironically, of all people, Asami – who had brought him into that situation – had been the one to make the flames in his eyes blaze once again. Yoh still could not forget the moment Feilong’s eyes had caused him to shiver – it had been the first time he had felt attracted to him.

He answered, “So with this target, your hands are tied as boss of the Baishe, but it’s someone you can leave to me? And therefore I have to kill him.”

“You are quick on the uptake.” Feilong smiled and stood back a bit again.

However, there was little use that could be made of this information. It was certain that Feilong felt that extreme caution had to be exercised regarding this person. For the principals, professional contract killers were a kind of pawn they could sacrifice at any time, and should Yoh fail at his mission – he was no longer a part of the organization anyway. Thus it would easily be possible to pretend he was not in any way connected to the Baishe. At first glance it may have looked like a one-sided negotiation, but upon closer inspection it was one on a level playing field – a negotiation between principal and agent, not between boss and subordinate. It was not an assignment Feilong would have entrusted random other people with.

“All right,” replied Yoh, “I will accept the mission.”

And he did not do it because he felt his pride was challenged by Feilong’s statement. He should have been killed already when his treason – the connection with Asami – had come to light. He had practically already resigned himself to death. Feilong, however, had not killed him, so he was in his debt, and whatever his selection criteria were, only Yoh seemed to qualify for him.

“If I can settle my debt with this...”

Upon this answer, Feilong gave a pleased nod and concealed his face with the hood once more. “At this time, this area is too busy. I’m going to come again tomorrow evening, before the nightly market opens. We will reason out further conditions then.”

Yoh nodded. He would have liked to learn more, but if he stayed absent from work for too long, there would possibly be suspicion – it was about time to go back into the shop. But just at this moment, Feilong’s head tilted towards his

ear, and he whispered in a quiet voice, "One more thing... I was followed here tonight."

Yoh's body tensed. No matter how disguised Feilong was, he could not hide the aura surrounding him. So the pursuer knew exactly who he was. Angry at his own carelessness not to have noticed this thirst for blood, he looked around. "Since when? Do you have an idea who it...?"

However, his whispering questions suddenly ebbed away. Somehow Feilong was acting too calmly.

"Can't you guess?" asked Feilong, a little awkwardly.

All of a sudden, he seemed to be a different person. Yoh immediately knew who the 'pursuer' was as he saw Feilong shrugging his shoulders with a slightly agonized smile. Touching his own temples, Yoh whispered, "Tao! So he just followed you?!"

Tao was Feilong's parlor boy and the only one whom he trusted. He had probably missed his master so much that he could not help going after him, for even if Feilong looked after him caringly at all times, he was not always able to be with him. So far, Tao had always virtuously waited for Feilong's return, but he seemed to be past that age.

"Nothing can be done about it anymore today, but please urge him to fly back tomorrow morning. You don't have to tell him I noticed him either."

If it was about Tao, it was usually rare for him to put on such a strict look. Occasionally he showed his heartless face, but towards Tao he acted awfully caringly. Although he was almost thirteen years old, he was probably still a little child to Feilong. But it did not escape Yoh's attention that aside from care for Tao, a dark shadow appeared on the pale beauty's face; apparently he really wanted to avoid Tao finding out the content of the mission. Even if Tao grew up well-protected, he must have realized what the work of his guardian entailed. That Feilong explicitly asked him to speak to Tao nonetheless implied unusual circumstances.

"Understood. I will talk to him."

No, the circumstances of his client were of no concern to Yoh. The only

important thing to him was the elimination of the target.

“I am counting on you.” Feilong turned to leave. Simultaneously, the back kitchen door opened.

“How long are you planning to relax?” someone yelled from the kitchen. Since Yoh had not returned yet, the shop owner probably wanted to check if everything was in order. Suddenly, the shouts of the clothes sellers and the mass of people from the front side of the street, which had seemingly been muted with Feilong’s appearance, sank back in on him.

“Coming straightaway!” Yoh responded. When he turned around once more, Feilong was already gone. As stealthily as he had appeared, he had vanished again, and apparently he had not even thought it necessary to say goodbye to Yoh. The elegant, sudden disappearance amazed him. “Hah...”

In contrast to his coldhearted air as leader, Feilong could sometimes give his subordinates a scrutinizing smile. Even if one knew exactly that his nature was calculating, one was won over by him at a moment’s notice. Yoh had indifferently observed it with others as a customary ceremony, and only now that he had left the clan, he realized that he had fallen for it as well.

“Sorry, boss!”

Once Yoh was back to his post, the owner of the shop wordlessly pointed his chin towards the entrance. Following his glance, he could see a boy lingering in the front of the shop and inspecting the inside. The little visitor had followed Feilong, but must have lost sight of him in this district. His face looked like the one of a clueless, lost child.

“He is well-dressed, but he’s been acting like that all the time. Is that your kid?”

Yoh put a hand to his forehead on account of the horrible misunderstanding. “Of course not! He’s the child of... an acquaintance.”

He shortly hesitated in saying so, yet he did not know how else to explain it, therefore his boss did not quite seem to buy it either. Yoh briefly excused himself and left the shop. He walked straight up to the boy. Tao’s eyes began to sparkle when he caught sight of him.

“Yoh? It is you, Yoh, isn’t it? We haven’t seen each other for so long! But what are you doing here?” Tao probably had not expected to see him again here in Taiwan. The child’s eyes were wide as he ran over to Yoh. “You just disappeared when I was in the hospital. I was very worried because of that. It’s good to see you’re all right!” At the end of his flood of words, he tilted his head and started mumbling away to himself quizzically, “Hm, did Master Fei come here to see Yoh? But...”

His voice sounded a little hoarse, but it did not seem to bother him. He appeared to be doing well. Yoh was staggered at Tao’s unchanged guilelessness. “Weren’t you told anything?” he asked.

“Eh? Told what?” replied Tao, puzzled. A few months ago, before Yoh left the clan, he had managed to take the key to the safe away from Tao to pass on the contained deeds for the casino in Macau, which Feilong had inherited from his father, to Asami. He had betrayed Tao and taken the treasure from him that Feilong had entrusted to him, and yet the boy was smiling at him as usual. Feilong had probably kept it a secret from him on purpose. Yoh tried to shake off those thoughts and grabbed Tao’s arm. “Never mind. Tell me what you’re doing here, Tao!”

“Huh? Uhm... I just wanted to have a look... inside...?”

He was likely on the brink of telling the truth. His emergency lie was interrupted by a stomach growling. He sheepishly put a hand over his belly and smiled at Yoh a tad uncomfortably. It seemed someone was hungry.

“Come along!” sighed Yoh and went back into the shop with him. Having seated Tao at a table in the corner, he entered the kitchen. He wanted to prepare something simple and looked around. Just then, the wife of the innkeeper handed him a tray with one bowl of each rice and soup, and briskly indicated to him to bring it to the boy.

“He’s hungry, isn’t he?”

“Yes, thank you very much!”

He had met the couple running the shop shortly after having come to Taiwan. Yoh was a killer, but he was also a refugee, and to settle down in this country discreetly, he had decided to look for an especially tight and dirty job at those

bustling stalls. He wanted to live under the radar and avoided contact with people, hence he was grateful for his reticent employers who never interfered in anything. They had both had a difficult childhood, and their deep compassion, which probably sprang from that, had already helped Yoh many times.

He slightly bowed his head as thanks and brought the tray to Tao's table. Both the bowl of rice with the sweet and salty cooked bacon and the rice noodle soup with a lot of deep-fried tofu and vegetables were national dishes in Taiwan.

"Eat before it gets cold," said Yoh and put down the food in front of Tao.

Tao's eyes began sparkling again. "Can I really?"

Apparently, he had been so busy following Feilong that he had not had time to eat at all. He did not waste much time on speeches of thanks and started to shovel the food steaming deliciously before him into his mouth. As the wife saw his big appetite from the kitchen, she smiled. Yoh exhaled, pulled back a chair, and sat down across from Tao.

"I want you to go back to Hong Kong as soon as you've eaten your fill. Tomorrow morning..."

"I don't wanna!"

At this prompt refusal, Yoh could not help but blink – he had never seen this behavior from Tao before, at least not when he had still been a member of the Baishe. He automatically took a closer look at the boy and arrived at the conclusion that puberty was likely to blame. So his slightly raspy voice was also to be attributed to voice break. As he tried to recall his own puberty, the taste of an unripe tangerine came into his mind, and he pushed the thought away. But now he knew that it would have little effect to simply scold him. He composed himself and rephrased his order. "You promised Master Feilong not to undertake too much anymore. You shouldn't be a burden to him with your actions."

"I'm not! I arranged my lodging here myself!" Tao proudly took a slip of paper from his bag while chewing and let it flutter around under Yoh's nose, so he seized the opportunity and fished it from Tao's fingers without further ado.

"What's the big idea?! Give it back to me!"

Yoh dodged Tao's hands, which were trying to catch the stolen piece of paper

again, and let his eyes wander across the address printed on the map – apparently Tao had booked a room in an accommodation close to the place where Feilong was staying. During his growing up, he had acquired troublesome abilities as well.

Yoh returned the slip of paper to him and sighed. “That’s not the point! If something were to happen to you, it would make your master sad.”

Feilong probably loved the boy more than the little child thought, which also became apparent through Feilong’s dismay at Tao having to be hospitalized because he had wanted to protect his master. The members of the Baishe gave their own profit top priority. It was hard to imagine what a burden it had to be, keeping a widely scattered crime organization together at just twenty-nine years of age. Tao was surrounded by inhumanity and brutality, and yet he did not know what it meant to be betrayed. To Feilong, he was a calm anchor. Seven years ago, Feilong had lost his whole family in one stroke, and Tao was the only one he still considered his kin and cared for.

“I won’t let that happen! ‘Cause I’m gonna protect Master Fei.”

Tao slurped up the soup in the bowl and proudly puffed out his chest. Respect was reflected in the eyes of the pubescent boy. He admired Feilong very much, who was like a father or brother to him. As of yet, his life was unsullied. But would he pursue the same path as Feilong someday? Yoh quickly discarded this brief train of thought. It was none of his business.

“You can say a lot, but if something happened to you, you would trouble Master Feilong with that. How do you intend to protect him by disregarding his will?! Be a bit more mature!”

This harsh reprimand caused Tao to puff up his cheeks. He probably thought of himself as grown-up; however, in some situations, the child inside him still surfaced.

“Do you understand what I said, Tao?!”

“All right! I’ll go already. Satisfied?” He gave the last word a special emphasis. Then he pursed his lips and nodded grudgingly. Regardless of whether he was aware of it or not, he probably owed his direct nature and his sometimes slightly unworldly innocence – due to which it was hard to believe that he had grown up

among the mafia – purely and simply to Feilong’s care. When would this innocent boy realize how special the position he was in actually was?

“Chīhǎo le*!” [*Chin.: “Thank you for the meal!”]

Just as Yoh wanted to stress once more that Tao had to return to Hong Kong the following day, he got up from his seat with the emptied bowls and contentedly wiped his mouth.

“Tao!”

Without paying Yoh any attention, he gave his thanks to the shop owners and proceeded towards the exit. Yoh swiftly went after him, but just as he was about to grab his arm, Tao abruptly came to a stop.

“Yoh...” He looked up at him with a mature expression on his face. At this moment, even though Yoh overtowered him by two heads, Tao suddenly seemed taller to him, which was rather confusing.

“I’m glad to have met you here, Yoh!” he eventually said to him. “You’d suddenly disappeared and I was really worried about you. It’s nice to see you’re okay.”

“Tao...”

“Thanks for everything! I’ll be going, then.” Tao’s shy smile momentarily rendered Yoh speechless, and while he was still struggling for words, Tao turned around and ran into the hustle and bustle of the market.

“This rascal...”

He gazed after Tao’s jaunty steps and sighed. It seemed as if Tao knew everything, but in the end he knew nothing after all. He had no idea how many people were courting for Feilong’s attention every day. And yet, Tao was currently the only one whom Feilong trusted. At some point, he had suddenly been by Feilong’s side and had since then carried out the work of a parlor boy. There were people in the clan who were bothered by Feilong’s special behavior towards Tao; however, no one ever seemed to ask about the reason. Therefore it was probably a subject matter that was better not addressed. Be that as it may, all of that no longer had anything to do with Yoh anymore.



[~next chapter](#)

Stigma in the Finder II (Finder no Rakuin)

His hollow cheeks, his sharp, dauntless gaze, and his brand of cigarettes had not changed. Maybe he was just a touch bolder than before. While Feilong weaved his way through the throng in the market street, he thought of the man he had just met. Yoh had not demanded any information he could not give. People who did not make unnecessary inquiries could be trusted – for it is the patient cat that catches the prey. He thought about what he had said to Yoh.

“I want you to kill someone for me...

He let his words course through his mind again.

There was a reason for his secret visit in Taiwan. Should members of the Baishe learn who the target was, it would not only unhinge his leading position, it would shake the whole organization to its very foundations. It began seven years ago, on a rainy night: Liu Talen, the former leader of the Baishe and also Feilong's stepfather, was shot. That day, the clan lapsed into a state of chaos. His older stepbrother – Yan Tsui – was badly wounded by the hands of Asami Ryuichi, and Feilong, who had narrowly escaped death, was arrested and thrown into jail. His natural father, To, was shot to death as well. And so, in one single night, he lost all those he could call his relatives. Only in prison had he learned that the bullet that had taken Liu Talen's life had not stemmed from the same weapon To had been shot with. To had been killed by Asami – but Liu Talen had been murdered by his own son, Yan Tsui. Asami had great influence on the Hong Kong police, thus Yan Tsui had not just been suspected of Liu Talen's murder, but also the murder of To. However, the truth looked quite different. The knowledge of this incredible fact lay deeply buried in Feilong's heart even now, and the truth would never pass his lips. Yan Tsui, who was now prosecuted as a potential culprit, had vanished without a trace, and rumor had it that he had died, but in reality he had merely fled. After first moving from one place to the next, he eventually struck roots in Taiwan. Yan Tsui was still alive. But Feilong had only discovered this alarming truth after being released from jail, rebuilding the Baishe, and becoming the new leader. To say that he was dismayed about this circumstance would have been an understatement – knowing that Yan Tsui had murdered his

benevolent father and was now living his carefree new life made Feilong's blood boil. Why had he murdered their father?! Feilong preferably would have headed out this instant to confront his brother; he had even contemplated taking the matter into his own hand. However, he forced back those thoughts resolutely, because Yan Tsui was, despite everything, the biological son of Liu Talen, the former boss of the clan, and in China, murder within one's own family was condemned. Even without taking the last words of his deceased father into consideration, he was not allowed to turn a weapon on his brother, no matter how good the reason for it. He remembered Liu Talen's urgent request in the hour of his death. He had asked him to forgive Yan Tsui.

"You have to forgive Yan..."

This last will made Feilong's heart bleed. Liu Talen had forgiven Yan Tsui, although he had killed him. Feilong had decided to comply with the wish of his father, but not in order to preserve his brother's honor. Then it reached his ears that Yan Tsui, who had fled from Hong Kong, was now living in Taiwan under a false name and even led a mafia organization. He probably wanted to purge his sinful past – his failure at bringing the Baishe in line, and his downfall through an outsider. It was difficult to compare him with Asami, but it seemed that greed was always a welcome drive for Yan Tsui as well. Even if Feilong had known exactly what his brother was up to currently, he had always been able to restrain himself from acting so far. Whatever it was that he was planning right now, as long as it was harmless, Feilong wanted to overlook it. But then a spy brought him news that the Russian mafia was giving his brother support, and although his father's last wish had been another, Feilong could not let Yan Tsui's actions go unregarded any longer. There was no telling to what extent the Russian mafioso Mikhail Arbatov was already working with the Taiwanese mafia. However, there was another party within the Baishe that viewed Yan Tsui, the biological son of the former leader, as rightful successor, and should these lowlives learn that Yan Tsui was still alive, it was impossible to predict what might happen. What was certain was that a coup was going to take place. Those who dared to disturb the harmony of the clan had to be disposed of; as head of the organization, he had passed this ruthless verdict. His personal relationship with his stepbrother had only played into this resolve to a limited extent.

Abruptly, Feilong, who was strolling through the market plaza, came to a halt. His glance was drawn to one of the tables which stood messily at the side of the street. Two siblings were sitting there, putting their heads together and reading a school book they had lying in front of them with the help of the faint light of the stalls. Their parents were presumably working in a stand nearby. It seemed they were doing their homework; a fidgety little boy was letting his older brother, who was around thirteen years old, show him how to look up words in a dictionary. They were surrounded by people who were just coming from work. On the tables there was warm dinner. The people were chatting sociably and it was very lively – an ordinary everyday scene in Taiwan. Suddenly, memories from his own childhood were awakened. When he had been a boy, he had respected Yan Tsui as his older brother. They had learned and lived together, along with Yan Tsui's father. He could not get it out of his head, the feeling of how Yan Tsui had tenderly caressed his hand every time they had cut his beloved ebony hair.

Am I perhaps still hesitating? Feilong thought.

The mission for Yoh would be to kill Yan Tsui secretly.

Even though he was going to avenge his father's death with it, he would have been lying to say that he did not feel any indecision at all in the face of this assignment. His hesitation was not only due to his memories of the past or his esteem towards him as brother.

Tao... He thought of the innocent smile of the boy who looked after his well-being at the headquarters in Hong Kong – and of the fact that Tao was Yan Tsui's natural son. Feilong was the only one who knew this closely guarded secret, and it was never to come out in the open either. No one, not even members of the Baishe, let alone Tao, knew anything about it.

He had heard that Tao's mother had been the wife of a common Baishe member. On some kind of whim, Yan Tsui had laid hands on her, and she had fallen pregnant with Tao, but there had been complications at birth and she had died. There was no way of finding out what had happened to her husband after that, and the old couple that had taken in their new-born grandson had died shortly thereupon, thus Tao had been the only one left behind. Not uncommon in the lower class of a criminal organization. However, the child was blood-related to Yan Tsui – that changed the situation. It was pure chance that he

learned of Tao's existence. To Feilong, who had been adopted by the Liu family, he was therefore a nephew, even if they were not connected by blood. Back then, the ways of Feilong and Yan Tsui were already separated for good, but Tao was not at fault for that. And if he had the child of someone who was virtually a relative by his side, it might give his strife-torn soul comfort as well.

When he had taken Tao under his wing, he had been driven by nothing more than the feeling of picking up a stray cat off the roadside. Had Feilong not been in this mood at that time, Tao could not have survived under any circumstances – even in normal society it was hard for a young orphan to get by, and in the mafia world things were a lot rougher. Tao's ancestry had stayed concealed, and Feilong had let him work as a parlor boy provisionally. At some point, however, he became his shelter of fondness. Behind Tao's frankness were no malicious intents whatsoever. Every day Feilong had to expect to be deceived, but Tao would never betray him. He could trust him. He respected only him. For Feilong, he had become an irreplaceable person. Every now and then, there had also been moments in which he had perceived it as unpleasant that Tao knew nothing about all this; since Tao belonged to the Liu family, he should have been welcomed warmly. Privileged by his status, he essentially was not someone who had to spend his life as just a parlor boy. However, apart from that, sentiments of paternal love developed inside Feilong which did not want to make Tao a mafioso. It was possible that it was very selfish to keep the thirteen-year-old boy within his reach nevertheless, but the way he was growing up innocently and cheerfully gave Feilong peace; yet at the same time, an immense conflict arose in him when Tao looked at him with his affectionate glance. Was it really good for him if he continued to let him stay in this underworld? Feilong knew about the hypocrisy, the exploitative behavior, and the lowlives that were conspiring against him or backstabbing him. It was precisely because he had grown up among those bloodthirsty conflicts that he thought it was not yet too late for Tao.

And should he find out Yan Tsui's secret... He developed his thoughts further. When Tao had learned that Feilong would travel to Taiwan on his own, he had tenaciously insisted on accompanying him. It was not just the childish wish of not wanting to be left behind; he had been seriously willing to come along as a security escort for Feilong, because he had regarded it as too dangerous for him

not to take any of his men with him. Had it been a cleaner matter, Feilong might actually have considered it, but the goal of this journey was the murder of Yan Tsui. To Feilong, his brother was no more than a risk factor, but nothing could change the fact that he was also Tao's father. Tao was not to learn under any circumstances what the actual purpose of this trip was. When Feilong arrived in Taiwan, he noticed that the little boy, whom he had originally left behind, had followed him, however Tao had managed to arrange that.

He would not stay an ignorant child forever. Over time, Tao had not only distinguished himself through high learning aptitude, but also the ability to put his ideas into practice. Gradually, he was becoming an adult man. He was not entirely spared from the criminal world, but thus far Feilong had always tried to raise him as far away from the worst depravity as possible. Now, he was not sure anymore if it had really been a good decision to have kept him in this bloody world until the age of thirteen.

No... that is a fallacy, he told himself. The possibility that at some point a dreadful situation would be brought about due to Feilong's naivety and hesitation was by no means small. To free himself from the spell of his brother and unify the Baishe again, it was necessary to cast off all superfluous ballast. He was ready to accept any bloodshed as long as it made it possible to strengthen the group. Before Tao found out about the secret, Yan Tsui had to be eradicated. Feilong averted his eyes from the peaceful family scene in the bustle of the market and disappeared back into the darkness.

The following evening, Feilong stealthily snuck out of his hotel room and set out to visit Yoh's shop as arranged. He got into the empty elevator and pressed the button for the lobby. He did not wear a disguise like the day before, but rather his usual suit with no tie and a white shirt, the two top buttons of which were open. The elevator door closed. While the metal box smoothly moved downward, the cell phone in his shirt pocket suddenly started vibrating. In a fluent movement he pulled it out, looked at the display, and could not hold back a speechless, slightly wry smile. He murmured to himself, "How about some useful information for a change..."

It was an email from Takaba Akihito from Japan. It was hard to tell whether the short text was a lament or a simple monologue – at any rate, it was cluttered

with smileys. Well, for Akihito it was possibly very important, even if it sounded rather trivial to Feilong. When he tucked the phone back into the pocket of his shirt, he let the memories of faraway Japan awaken.

That reminds me, Tao also wanted to go to Japan again, he thought.

Tao was supposed to have been on his way back home yesterday already – surely he had already arrived at headquarters in Hong Kong safe and sound. Feilong was aware that Tao was not a little child anymore, and a boy full of curiosity should not be confined all the time. Certainly it would not be a bad idea to take him along on the next trip to Japan, even if that was still written in the stars.

A faint beeping sound signaled that he had arrived at the requested floor, and the door opened. The personnel at the reception noticed him attentively and approached him as he walked through the foyer and outside, where the hot evening air abruptly surrounded him. The horizon was not tinged by the afterglow yet; instead, dark gray clouds were pushing themselves across the sky. According to the weather forecast, it was supposed to thunder from evening until midnight. The limousine of the hotel, varnished in black, slid toward the entrance on soft tires and came to a stop in front of Feilong. He sat down on the back seat, whereupon the porter closed the door gallantly.

Motor scooters sped tirelessly through the streets of Taiwan, which were full of colors and scents. Had his objective here not been such a perilous undertaking, he could have gone touring with Tao through this exotic atmosphere for a change. He was not entirely uncomprehending in terms of Tao's actions, following him in secret without any permission at all. When he had been shot by Asami in Japan and returned to Hong Kong with injuries, Tao had greeted him in tears as if they were his own wounds. The situation burdened him because in front of him, it was only ever said Feilong was going to work, but in reality it was never certain where he was and what exactly he was doing. Tao was probably constantly being reminded of his helplessness and fear to only be able to wait for Feilong's return.

I will bring him here at a better time. Tao would surely enjoy that.

And because he had almost never taken him on a real journey, Tao would be

thrilled about it. He imagined Tao's laughing face, and his heart immediately became a little lighter.

While he was still letting his thoughts circle around endlessly, the car had already come close to the destination. Feilong activated the button of the intercom system. "Let me get out somewhere around here."

Driving up with a limousine would attract too much attention, so he got out of the car away from the market area and walked a short way. Maybe it was down to the fact that it was not time for dinner yet, but compared to the previous evening, very few people were on the road. Instead, the busy cries of the shop staff preparing themselves for opening hours were audible every once in a while. Just like yesterday, he went to the back side of the shop, where Yoh was already waiting for him; his mien expressionless, he stood leaning against the wall and was smoking a cigarette. Apparently, Yoh was convinced of having settled well in Taiwan and being inconspicuous, but examining him through the eyes of an expert, one could see straightaway that he was always vigilant.

"Feilong!" he called when he noticed his figure. He threw his cigarette on the ground and crushed it with his toecap. The warmth which the asphalt had accumulated during noon was arising, glimmering, and Yoh's shape reflected in it as though it was only a Fata Morgana.

"Did I make you wait?" asked Feilong.

"No, I was just here earlier," replied Yoh.

As if it were a secret rendezvous, Feilong beckoned him over into the shadows of the building, for in Yoh's shop, the preparations were also running at full speed. While they both walked through the narrow alley, Feilong addressed a subject that bothered him a lot, "Were you able to persuade Tao?"

"He said he'd understood. Although he didn't seem especially happy about it."

"I see..."

As long as Yoh had been able to convince Tao, Feilong was pleased with this assertion. Today, he had not observed a follower either – certainly Tao had already safely arrived in Hong Kong. Feilong took off his tinted sunglasses and put them in his shirt pocket. However, suddenly something happened, just as he

was about to raise the main subject. Loud steps caused both of them to fall silent. The shop was not open yet, hence not many people had business at the back door. A five or six-year-old girl broke the tense atmosphere by sticking out her face in between the tight passageway of the two shops, looking around uneasily like she was searching for something.

“Looks like someone got lost...”

But those words had barely left Yoh’s mouth when the girl turned around to them. Apparently, she had found what she had been looking for, because a smile spread across her round face, and she unsuspectingly went over to the two men and came to a halt before Feilong.

“Here!” Without further ado, she handed him a white envelope. Yoh and Feilong exchanged glances. The latter’s eyes seemed to inquire if Yoh knew the girl, but the child appeared to be a stranger to him as well. Probably a girl from the neighborhood. An ordinarily dressed, cute girl.

“What about it?” Feilong took the envelope doubtingly, but when he turned it around, his face grew pale; an emblem that was familiar to him leapt to his eye. He quickly opened the letter.

A black curl of hair fell out as he turned the letter around. It took both their breaths away.

“Feilong...”

But Yoh’s quiet voice did not reach him. Feilong’s hand began shaking unconsciously. He immediately knew whose hair it was that lay silkily in his fingers. In the enclosed letter there were the address of a nearby harbor and the number of a warehouse, and the vintage ransom note was completed by the demand to come alone if he did not want the owner of the strand of hair to be killed. Feilong looked sharply at the girl.

“Where did you get that? Who gave it to you?”

Even though he held it back, the anger in his tone was unmistakable. The girl’s innocent face abruptly changed, and she took a tremulous step back.

“I... I was told that there was a young man with long hair behind the shop and I should give him the envelope...”

“What did the man look like? Do you know him?” Feilong dug deeper.

The girl was almost on the verge of tears. She shook her head vigorously. “I... I’ve never seen him. It was a man I don’t know. He gave me pocket money for it.”

“Feilong!”

Yoh could not stand by and watch any longer and held him back. Feilong sighed, averting his gaze from the girl.

She was probably nothing more than a passer-by; it was highly unlikely that there was anything more to learn from the person who had played messenger for a little tip. Once Feilong’s deathly glare broke off, the girl turned around instantly and ran away like a scalded cat. Her small steps moved further and further away until they had disappeared. As if he had waited for it, Yoh leaned closer to Feilong with a sinister mien.

“What’s in the letter?”

“Obsolete platitudes of a kidnapper. He even especially asks for me to come alone,” muttered Feilong with a tang of sarcasm and handed Yoh the slip of paper. A strand alone did not prove that Tao was still alive, and even if he should be alive, the possibility that he had been maltreated by use of drugs or violence could not be ruled out. Yan Tsui did not know that Tao was his biological son...

Deep furrows showed on Feilong’s face. Yoh was making a phone call.

Why... does he know...? Feilong pondered. The visit in Taiwan was top secret, let alone his true intentions here. He had not thought it possible that Tao, who had nothing to do with this matter, could be abducted. He refused to believe it, but it suggested itself that Yan Tsui, in turn, was monitoring Feilong’s actions as well.

I was too careless...

He should not have left Tao alone. Feilong would have been no easy prey, but it did not seem to have posed a major problem to take a child following him hostage. Why had he not taken him back to the hotel with him last night? Had he brought him to the airport in the morning, Tao would not have gotten swept up in this affair. Feilong cursed his own negligence and let this bitter feeling brand itself deeply in his mind.

Yoh ended the phone call and said with his head hanging, “Please forgive me! I bear the responsibility for this. I should have made sure Tao really got on the plane.”

Tao had checked out of his accommodation today morning, so he must have been kidnapped over the course of the day, and Yoh, who had found out these things, was plagued by pangs of conscience. But Feilong replied, “No, this is not the time for recrimination. We have to help him fast.”

They did not have any time to lose – since the kidnapping, any amount of time between a few hours and half a day could have passed. While they were standing here, Tao’s life was in danger.

“This crest...”

An ominous emblem was depicted on the paper, similar to a black flame. It was the emblem of an organization of the Taiwanese mafia, headed by Yan Tsui. Since Yoh was living in the mafia world himself, he did recognize the crest which was visible on the letter, but he could not comprehend why a small aspiring organization incurred the wrath of the leader of the Hong Kong mafia. Even though Yoh was connected with the criminal world, the information that this very organization was led by the former Baishe boss’s son – and therefore Feilong’s stepbrother – did not seem to have reached him yet. In other words, this meant that Yan Tsui had skillfully concealed his past and settled down in the crime world of Taiwan. Feilong could not help smirking and murmured, “The head of this organization should have been eliminated by you. His name is Yan Tsui.”

At this statement, Yoh’s eyes widened, most likely because he had not even begun to think that Feilong had visited Taiwan to kill his brother – Yan Tsui.

“Yan Tsui?! You mean the son of the previous leader of the Baishe? But...?!”

“He has a cover name. Yan Tsui is not an idiot.”

Yoh probably would not have expected that Yan Tsui, who had disappeared without a trace, had gained foothold in Taiwan’s mafia world. One could tell by looking at him how interested he was in the further circumstances, but right now, each second was precious.

“As much as I regret it, there is no time to get to the details. The situation changed. I am going to take care of this matter on my own. Forget our talk yest...”

But before Feilong could finish his sentence, Yoh grabbed him, and his expression darkened. “Hold on! You’re not planning to go there, are you?!”

“Of course I am! He dared to take something from me, the head of the Baishe. Do you think he will get away unscathed?!”

“This is a trap!”

Feilong looked into Yoh’s intelligent eyes and could not help but laugh. “And?”

Of course Feilong was aware of that. He remembered Asami had held him back in a similar situation, but he had been swayed by the message about the critical condition of his stepfather and ultimately walked right into Yan Tsui’s trap.

This time, however, he was going in order to prove he was not being manipulated. He was neither his brother’s pawn nor an oppressed puppet.

“Should anything happen to Tao, I will kill this man.”

Due to those words which slipped through his lips so suddenly, he realized that he had made a decision long ago. He was not acting out of vanity or pride – he could not bear someone who was important to him being hurt. He would not forgive anyone for that.

“Very well, then,” said Yoh, aware he could not hold Feilong back, who was deliberately walking into the lion’s den. He gingerly loosened his grip around Feilong’s arm and spoke in a low voice, “I will gather information. You shouldn’t act thoughtlessly.”

His glance was serious. The place he had enclosed with his hands up until now was still warm. Feilong nodded wordlessly and turned away. He proceeded to the main road at a brisk pace; at this time of day he would get a taxi without any problems. The day slowly drew to a close, and the city was shrouded in nightly scents. The smell of humid dust reached Feilong’s nose, probably because of the upcoming rain. He raised a hand to hail a cab and lifted his eyes. The red color of the evening was shimmering through a gap in the gray clouds, as though a nightmarish demon was about to open his mouth and devour this city. This sight

further stoked his inner turmoil.

He let the taxi driver know the address noted on the piece of paper and slipped a tip into his hand so that he would hurry. The driver was puzzled by the unusual aura surrounding Feilong. His style of driving was crude, but he made haste. Feilong let himself sink into the back seat and folded his hands over his legs. He prayed Tao was all right. Not being able to do anything else made him nervous. Feilong tried to tame his restless emotions and reflected on how this situation could have come about. What were Yan Tsui's true intentions?

I can hardly imagine Yan Tsui figured out my murder plot, he thought.

Looking at the fact that Yan Tsui used Tao to bring Feilong out of his shell, there was no doubt that he was aiming for him. Yan Tsui did not know yet that Tao was his son. Presumably he believed it was harder to abduct Feilong and had instead settled on Feilong's precious Tao.

He took advantage of the fact that Tao followed me, he thought. He could not regret it enough. To this day, Yan Tsui was still full of hatred towards him. Feilong had ensured that the Baishe was revived again and thus rose as leader, but Yan Tsui felt bereft of his position. During the lifetime of his father, Feilong had even been forced to seduce men. It was typical of his brother to forever reproach him. Yan Tsui had made him dirty his hands to get rid of troublesome people and pressured him into using his body to win over target persons. It had always been the orders of his brother, always under the pretext that it was for the clan, and that he was to do it if he wanted to be accepted by their father. Feilong slowly shook his head. He wiped sweat from his brow. What had happened in the past was of no relevance. He was worried about Tao. The dispute between him and his brother had unintentionally gotten Tao entangled in this matter. He had to do his utmost to free him unharmed, else the damage would be irreparable.

The weather service ended up being right; on the way, it started to rain. Occasionally, the sky would brighten and thunder caused the window to quake, and the light of the street lamps gleamed through the big trickling raindrops. Soon afterwards, the taxi reached the destination. The view of the city made way for a monotone image; there was something desolate about the setting. At the docks, where factories and warehouses were attached to each other, there were

few people, so the bang of a shot or screams would not arouse much attention here – the perfect place for torturing a hostage. The location determined by Yan Tsui was a warehouse which served the distribution of goods, the roof of which was built from several construction frameworks in a row. A little away from the meeting spot, Feilong got out of the car and proceeded to the warehouse in the rain. There was not a soul to be seen, and the surrounding was uncannily quiet. The small red lamp at the entrance had to be a camera. This place probably functioned as a transshipment point for smuggled goods, as one of their hiding places, or possibly both. But even as Feilong showed himself completely openly, no one came out. The back door of the warehouse was not locked, as if it was downright inviting him to enter the hall. It could not be excluded that this was a trap and they wanted to trick him, but he did not have time to hesitate.

Tao... he thought.

His heart was on the verge of losing its rhythm. He tried to stay calm and entered. Only the emergency lamp gave light to the room. Inside, it was dusky, and the air was dry. Feilong pressed his back against the door, which he had closed behind him, and held his breath. Aside from forklifts for transportation of materials, stacked containers filled the hall. He approached one of the giant boxes with soundless steps.

But that's...

The inscription that was already flaking off showed the Russian letters for Vladivostok, thus the assumption suggested itself that the containers were used for the transport of smuggled weapons or drugs from Russia. He went deeper into the hall. The workroom beside the conveyor belt for the movement of goods was now visible. Bright light fell through the cracks of window and door. He snuck inside and ventured a glimpse through the reception window. In the room, a few sturdy men were currently enjoying a gamble, and apparently the game was more important to them than the guarding of the hideout. Five or six men were gathered around a tattered sofa and a low table. The security camera screens on the table in the back of the room almost seemed like decoration, as they were being ignored. Respecting the rules did not seem to be a big priority here. When the door opened, the men, who had just racketed about, abruptly stood up.

“Who’s there?!”

They closed in on Feilong while chewing palm nuts. Among them was a strongly-built man with a tattoo which ranged from his shoulder to his wrist. He examined Feilong appraisingly.

“What a pretty Shao Ji*. What are you doing here?” [*Chin. term for a young prostitute]

He arrogantly crossed his arms in front of his chest and spit on the dirty floor. It looked more like an assembly of crooks than actual mafiosi. Every time he opened his mouth, his teeth, colored red by palm nuts, appeared. Feilong knitted his eyebrows.

“I am here to meet Yan... I mean, your boss. Take me to him!”

“Did you hear that?! He wants to see the boss!”

They roared with laughter. Had Feilong been in Hong Kong, he would have long since blown their brains out by now, but he could hardly do that here. They probably were not aware who was standing before them. They scrutinized him with sneering grins and condescending glances. A man with a Fujian dialect approached him, who seemed to be the leader of this gang.

“Hands up. Our boss is very nitpicky. First, we have to check your body thoroughly.”

The other men, grinning, contracted the circle around Feilong so he had no way to escape. Surrounded like this, he was now under close observation. The leader stretched out his hand towards him.

Of course this wouldn’t go smoothly, Feilong thought.

The moment the man was about to touch his shoulder, Feilong’s hair fluttered in the wind as, at frenzied speed, he dealt a kick to the man’s chin. Simultaneously with a pained scream, the noise of a bone breaking sounded. The man was flung into the air and crashed to the ground.

“Don’t touch me!”

“Ah... Kh... Uh... Ah!” The arm the man had just lifted to protect himself was protruding at a strange angle. He writhed in agony, and blood trickled from his

shattered chin.

“Hey...”

No one really knew what had happened. The circle around Feilong became wider again. He did not deign to look at the man cowering on the floor; instead, his attitude imperious, he looked over to the other men. “If you go too far, it will cost you dearly.”

He gazed at them sharply. It was clear from his glance that he did not have time to deal with insignificant minions. Finally, one of the men seemed to understand, and his face grew as pale as death. “Hey... isn’t that... the guy the boss said would visit...?”

He probably remembered there had been an instruction by Yan Tsui beforehand. As if their senses had returned, they stepped out of his way.

“Come on, take me to him!” Feilong indicated with a sharp movement of his head.

Underneath the bureau was a secret room, where the fragrance of incense was hovering in the air. Contrary to the minor size of the organization, they seemed to be doing rather well for themselves here. The furnishing in the spacious room was designed in Chinese style, and a dragonfish with red scales was leisurely swimming in a fish tank shimmering in blue. Further back, there was a color-matched folding door. So the room continued beyond that.

“I am proud of you, Fei! You followed my instructions and came alone.”

A man was sitting on a sofa which was covered by delicate wood craft, grinning and leaning against the backrest. His Chang Pao* was loose and untidy.

[*traditional Chinese clothing]

Feilong’s countenance froze when he heard the voice. *Is that... really Yan Tsui?* he asked himself.

Nothing of his elite appearance could be recognized anymore. His stepbrother was sitting in front of him, tainted by the foulness of the mafia world, and one could tell from his feral, garishly flashing gaze how much his life had spiraled out of control.

Feilong suppressed his shock. “Yan Tsui...”

Even through the clothes, it was visible how skinny he was. Only his eyes were gleaming – the typical aspect of a drug addict. His sleeves were rolled up, and one could see the injection marks on his arm. Spies had already informed Feilong about this change, but now that he was standing right in front of him, he was overcome by a somber feeling. So Yan Tsui had already sunk so low... Through the intake of opium or heroin, his mind and body were decayed; there was nothing left of his former looks. The Russian mafia, led by Mikhail Arbatov, supported Yan Tsui – it was not just money and weapons that found their way from Russia to Yan Tsui, then. Feilong remembered Yan Tsui had once told him Mikhail Arbatov was a soldier, but now it appeared the tide had been turned. It was not discernible from Yan Tsui’s bleary eyes what he thought about that. Feilong was the head of the Hong Kong underworld, whereas Yan Tsui had been cast out by the Baishe even though he was Liu Talen’s son. Now that the two of them were facing one another, Yan Tsui’s altered form showed which decision had affected the course of their lives.

“Don’t you want to call me brother, like you used to?”

Feilong did not know what exactly he found so funny, but Yan Tsui was laughing quietly to himself. If he let himself be provoked, he would give him what he wanted. Beside the men that had brought Feilong inside, more confidants were in the room; they acted as if they were the epitome of calm, but one could read from their faces that they were keen on a dispute. And yet, the most important person was missing – Tao was nowhere to be seen. Was he possibly held at another place, or not even alive anymore? As long as Feilong had not found that out, he could not do anything foolish. His impatience was increasing; however, he kept himself under control and looked at Yan Tsui in silence.

“Ever the cunning sly dog. Men, you can step back.”

Yan Tsui let as few as one of his men stay. This man was the only one of them wearing an expression barely anything could be read from, and unlike the others, he had a sharp look. He kept it hidden so it did not instantly strike the eye, but it was apparent from the unusual bulge in his suit that there was a gun underneath it.

"I came alone like you demanded it. Give me back Tao!"

"Tao?"

"The boy you kidnapped!"

"Oh... you mean that brat?" scoffed Yan Tsui huskily.

He slowly rose from the sofa and shuffled over to Feilong. His breath almost touched him, and he looked Feilong in the face.

"You seem to look after him pretty caringly. He's well-bred, too."

"Yan Tsui, you wretched bastard!"

Feilong's gaze hardened. Yan Tsui ignored his demand to give Tao back to him. His eyes narrowed, he reached out his bony hand and stroked across Feilong's cheek.

"Your face still looks like a woman's."

The memory from seven years ago awoke inside Feilong. "Don't touch me!"

He intuitively wanted to slap the hand away, but the thin fingers seized his chin, grabbing it with such strength that his face contorted with pain. "Kh...!"

"If you defy me, I don't know what I'm gonna do with the boy."

Those words at least gave away that Tao was still alive. Yan Tsui had always been a cunning man. He would not kill Tao. After all, he could impede Feilong's actions and threaten him with him as hostage. But as long as Feilong had not assured himself of Tao's well-being, it was not wise to oppose Yan Tsui.

"Yes, that's right! You don't have to do anything other than obey me."

He laughed and let go of Feilong's chin. Then he stepped behind Feilong, who had to put up with it, and wrapped both his arms around him.

"Yan, what are you doing?!"

"First, I want to make sure you're not hiding anything dangerous."

Yan Tsui's hands, which clasped Feilong from both sides, slid down his body sideways.

Again... Feilong thought. Yan Tsui was in the act of performing a body search in

front of his subordinate. Feilong had heard those words once before, and he was not just tired but sick of them.

“Do what you want!”

He would only make Yan Tsui happy if he lost his composure, and so he stood there with his head held high. Yan Tsui lifted Feilong’s hair and pressed his lips against his neck. He licked across it, and Feilong’s hair stood on end. His jacket buttons were opened, and Yan Tsui’s hand brushed across his chest.

Even though he did not touch Feilong’s body with much force, the obtrusive way his hand moved was repulsive to him. Yan Tsui fumbled around extensively, as if he were recapturing his sensations from seven years ago that way. Feilong felt his body warmth through the fabric, and he now perceived his brother’s body odor again after a long time. However, this did to no degree spark nostalgia inside him, but solely negative feelings. Only Yan Tsui’s rugged breath filled the room. His underling was watching the scenario with calm eyes.

“As far as that goes, you haven’t changed, Yan Tsui.”

Yan Tsui chuckled and eventually whispered into his ear, “And you? Does the touch of your brother arouse you?”

It made Feilong’s skin crawl as Yan Tsui ran his tongue across the outline of his ear. “Maybe in your dreams...”

“You can just be honest with yourself, Fei.”

Yan Tsui’s right hand, which had been groping across his chest as yet, now slipped down to Feilong’s hip, and a gentle grip between his legs made Feilong’s knees tremble. Yan Tsui touched the suit pants and lifted Feilong’s penis. In doing so, he stimulated it with his hand. His breathing beside Feilong’s ear was becoming heavier, and he pressed his hips against him.

“Yan!” Feilong could feel Yan Tsui’s manhood and could not help but swallow. His face became pale. He may only have been his stepbrother, but what kind of brother would get aroused by grabbing another brother between the legs? Animated by Yan Tsui’s fast puffs of breath, Feilong was breathing harder as well. He tightly clutched the arms that encircled him, so as not to make a sound, and firmly clenched his teeth. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not

stop his body from withdrawing. Yan Tsui immediately pulled Feilong's hips back against him and pressed his torso forward so that Feilong's backside stuck out towards him. As the fingers ran across the fabric at his butt, Feilong jerked his eyes open.

The up and down motion eventually stopped at the height of his anus. An instinctive sense of fear made him shiver. Yan Tsui's low voice and his tongue played around his ear, and his fingers sank deeper. "You didn't hide anything here either, Fei?"

"Yan...!"

"So I found something after all!"

Feilong turned around and was shown a gun – it was his own, which Yan Tsui had pulled from the holster at his hip. His brother must have noticed it a while ago, when he had stepped behind Feilong. He ground his teeth and glared at him indignantly.

"Don't you have enough by now? Let me see Tao!"

"Not so fast! The night is still young."

He toyed with the gun he had taken away from Feilong, and his face distorted strangely while he laughed; it seemed like he greatly enjoyed being able to do anything he wanted to Feilong. It had been involuntary, yet Feilong was still angry that he had lost his poise. Yan Tsui walked away a bit and picked up a remote control which lay on the table.

"Anyway, I did promise it..."

The accordion door at the end of the room opened as soon as he pressed the remote. The chamber situated behind the door was a bedroom. Its luxurious Chinese interior decoration was slowly revealed, equally a bed and antique porcelain, as well as a chest. Shortly before the door had parted completely, Feilong swallowed. His gaze was directed at the chair in the corner.

"Tao!"

On the chair sat a boy with his head hanging, hands tied together to the rest behind his back. His straight hair and characteristic hair whirl left no room for

doubt – it was Tao! He seemed to have been battered badly. A bruise was visible on his cheek, and they had blindfolded him with a white cloth. When Feilong spotted a reddish-black stain of blood on Tao's disarrayed shirt, he felt the blood in his veins begin to boil.

"You fucking...!"

"Hold it right there!"

Yan Tsui aimed the weapon in his hand at Tao. Feilong's face turned ashen, and he abruptly came to a halt. Yan Tsui's subordinate, who had held himself back until then, caught him in a headlock.

"Let me go!"

"He's only unconscious. But depending on what you do, that can change quickly."

"You disgusting...! What did you do to Tao?!"

Yan Tsui seemed to delight in Feilong's raging demeanor and laughed until his shoulders were shaking. "He had to play cool and didn't wanna hold still. That's why I smacked him so he'd keep his mouth shut. I even blindfolded him so he wouldn't be scared. Aren't I nice?"

Were Yan Tsui not holding Tao hostage, Feilong could have put an end to all of this long ago. In the clutch of the henchman, he shouted, "You better not harm a single hair on Tao's head!"

He is your son... he continued his sentence in his mind. He could not tolerate Yan Tsui hurting Tao, whatever the cost. Feilong knew from his own experience how painful it was when parents turned against their own child with murderous intents. But his hate-filled look apparently spurred Yan Tsui's desire.

He burst out laughing at the top of his voice, and without pointing the weapon away from Tao, he commanded, "Hold this brat's head tight, will you!"

The underling obeyed and let up on Feilong. He still kept his eyes on him attentively and whipped a knife out of his breast pocket, then he grabbed Tao's head by the hair, pulled it back, and positioned the sharp blade at his thin throat. A light pressure would be enough to cut through the carotid artery. Feilong

gulped.

“Stop it!”

“We haven’t seen each other in so long. Even though we’re brothers! Let’s savor our reunion, Fei!”

Yan Tsui, who now left his place to his henchman, gave a loud laugh and sat down on the bed at the side. He nodded indecently to Feilong, who was merely standing there silently. “Come, Fei!”

“What are you up to now?”

“I only want to give you a treat. Seven years ago, Father got in my way, but now there’s no one left to disturb us anymore.”

Feilong believed he could see Yan Tsui’s true face in the obscene laugh. Now he pointed the weapon at him and dictated, “Enough talking! Get a move on, Fei!”

At that moment, Feilong knew the score. It was Yan Tsui’s aim to oppress him once more and force his desire upon him. He had always viewed Feilong as his property. On the one hand, he looked down on him and believed Feilong did not have any right to succession; on the other hand, he was jealous of his quick wit. By playing with him like a chess piece, Yan Tsui had vented his anger on him, and now too, he tried to subdue Feilong in the same way.

And for this selfish idiocy he has Tao! he thought. At this notion, Feilong’s body shook with fury.

However, should he fight back, Yan Tsui would order his henchman to cut Tao’s throat without batting an eye. He darted a vitriolic glance at him and wordlessly stepped closer to the bed. Yan Tsui arrogantly spread his legs and indicated to him with a nod to kneel down before him. That Tao did not have to witness this was Feilong’s only comfort. He bent his knees and was now sitting between Yan Tsui’s widely opened legs.

“Go on, lick me!”

With a quick movement of the hand, he pushed his pants away and held his aroused manhood out to him. Stimulated by Feilong’s kneeling down, a drop of precome beaded at his glans. When Feilong averted his face, Yan Tsui clutched

his hair, pulled him closer forcefully, and pressed the bud of his sex to his lips. Disgusted by the slick precome, Feilong's brows tightened, and he clawed at Yan Tsui's thighs. Apparently Feilong's detesting expression aroused Yan Tsui, for his cock grew even harder.

Feilong knew that it would gratify him the more he showed his repulsion, but he simply could not help it. The sticky drops Yan Tsui was rubbing against him were nauseating. He looked down at Feilong triumphantly, who tried to suppress his aversion.

"Open your mouth and please me! You know what's going to happen if you bite!"

Yan Tsui seemed to lose patience with Feilong's resistance and grabbed his chin. In the process, he tried to open the tightly shut mouth by force with his fingers. Without surrendering his wordlessly defiant attitude, Feilong's gaze wandered to Tao, who was behind him. Yan Tsui's subordinate continued to hold the knife to Tao's throat without being impressed by the cruelty of his boss, and Tao was still unconscious and presenting his throat defenselessly.

"If you don't want the little boy to die, you should obey me!"

At first those words brought Feilong close to despair, but he instantly changed his mind – if he could protect Tao with it, a defilement by Yan Tsui was meaningless. He cast down his eyes and opened his lips. Yan Tsui's warm sex pushed apart the rows of his teeth and vigorously invaded his throat. His member was bigger than expected; the skin at the corners of Feilong's mouth cracked, and his jaw joint protested.

"Agh... Gh!" Due to the advance, his throat tightened at the imminent gag reflex, and he involuntarily bit down. Yan Tsui clicked his tongue disapprovingly and withdrew his hip again. When his cock abandoned Feilong, he started to cough.

"You amateur! I told you not to bite!"

"Hah...! Hah...! Uh..." Feilong's spit, mixed with the seed, ran down his lips, yet he looked up at Yan Tsui disparagingly. He only had to be patient until he knew Tao was safe. He was not so weak as to break because of something like that, and his pride would not be affected by it either.

“What’s with that look?”

Feilong’s consistently collected and confident attitude only appeared to anger Yan Tsui further. He pressed the gun opening against Feilong’s forehead, on which damp strands were hanging down. Feilong did not know whether it was because of Yan Tsui’s rage or due to the drugs, but his finger on the trigger was trembling slightly.

“You really seem to be depraved to the core, Yan Tsui.”

“Shut up! It seems to me that you’re not aware of what kind of situation you’re in!”

Once more, Yan Tsui grabbed him by the hair and forced him to look up, and then shoved his aroused sex into Feilong’s mouth again, rubbing his glans on his upper jaw. He pressed forward into his mouth greedily with ferocious thrusts of his hip. Even if Feilong tried to push him back with his tongue, his cock was too big for that. Each of Yan Tsui’s movements caused the saliva to trickle down his chin and throat, and the lack of air made his eyes water.

“You will learn what it means to be humiliated!”

“Uh! Ungh, uh...!” Feilong perceived the scent of fresh manhood, felt bristly pubic hair, and noticed the taste of concentrated secretion spreading on his tongue. Yan Tsui’s obtrusive fire got caught in the depths of his throat. Was there still no end to Yan Tsui’s thirst for revenge, even after seven years? Through the unrelenting act, Feilong became his toy, and instinctively, tears welled up inside him.

“Finally my wish comes true... I’ve always wanted to do this to you...” Yan Tsui’s face contorted as he desirously directed those virtually lunatic words at Feilong, his breath resembling the one of a wild beast. His cock was hard and big and tormented Feilong, who endured the humiliation and looked up at him with partly contemptuous, partly pitying eyes – Yan Tsui should go ahead and think he had managed to subjugate him. Even though these were his silent thoughts, Yan Tsui seemed to have surmised his sentiments. He spoke breathlessly, with bloodshot eyes; it sounded like crazed ramblings.

“It’s your fault! Because you went away, I lost everything! Everything is your fault... Fei! If you had just simply obeyed me...!”

He had presumably laid the blame for his own inadequacy on Feilong ever since the Baishe had started to persecute him – no, most likely even before that.

Yan Tsui seized Feilong's head with his hand and violently moved it back and forth. Feilong's mouth was being abused with nasty sounds. Yan Tsui was fierce as though he wanted to express his repressed hatred and buried desire that way. "Nh...!"

"I'm not indulgent like Father! I will subdue you so that you can't resist me anymore!"

With drive, he pulled his member out of Feilong's mouth, who had nearly choked on it, then he pulled his hair and made him stand up.

"You're deranged... Father was..."

But without being able to finish his sentence, Feilong was pushed onto the bed behind him. Yan Tsui ripped off his shirt, the buttons scattered in all directions, and Feilong's magnificent long hair spread over his exposed chest. Yan Tsui did not curb the force with which he brought his reluctant body under control, and Feilong groaned with pain.

"Father was always lenient towards you, but with me, he never made compromises. Even though you left, he blamed me for it. That was why I killed him. It's your fault Father died, Fei!"

Frozen, Feilong held his breath. *Did Yan Tsui kill Father for that reason?!*

Like an angry beast, Yan Tsui slid above Feilong, and repulsive glances ran across Feilong's naked skin. Reality seemed to him like an old slow-motion scene played without sound. In the face of the man seething with envy and craving, a mole was visible on the cheek.

In his heart, Feilong asked for his father's forgiveness and closed his eyes. Liu Talen had always loved him, without favoring his natural son, Yan Tsui. Now he could not meet his plea not to quarrel with his brother. Yan Tsui had already been consumed by darkness and was now controlled by it. The person in front of him was not his brother. There was nothing but a vulgar man who had thrown away the name Liu Yan Tsui and worked his way up to the top of the Taiwanese mafia.

And he is Tao's father... he thought.

Feilong opened his eyes. All his doubts dissolved and left only minor hurt behind. He stayed lying on his back and looked at Yan Tsui with dry eyes.

"It's over, Yan!"

Even though his exterior had changed so much that it was difficult to recognize Yan Tsui, his wicked grudge had not altered; if anything, his mania had worsened considerably due to the drugs. It would not be long anymore until both body and soul were wrecked.

"What's with that look?! I could never stand that look of yours!"

Feilong was looking at him disdainfully, yet with pity, which seemed to aggravate him. While Yan Tsui was breathing heavily, his grip around the gun tightened. Feilong instantly closed his eyes. A dull noise sounded, followed by blurring perception, and the throbbing in his ears alternated with faint pain. He concluded Yan Tsui must have hit him with the handle. The taste of blood spreading in his mouth led him to open his eyes – then he spat at Yan Tsui with his saliva mixed with blood.

Yan Tsui was fuming with anger and got ready to say something. But then he appeared to have changed his mind and started grinning meaningfully. "Say, whatever did happen with that Japanese?"

Feilong's shoulders jerked briefly. Yan Tsui lifted his chin with the barrel of the gun so that Feilong's unprotected throat lay bare. The cold muzzle slowly brushed across his white skin and paused before the gunshot wound that had been given to him seven years ago. Yan Tsui ran across the injury over and over, as if he meant to abuse it.

"This bullet wound... Who did you get that from? Was it that man as well? You're not saying anything. Right on the money, then... This one is new though."

The muzzle slid further upwards and pressed to the scar on his groin. Feilong could feel how the anorganic metal was gradually being warmed up by his body.

"I bet you cheated some guy again and screwed things up in the process."

The gun began wandering over his skin once more.

Some guy – that was Asami Ryuichi. Along with that unforgettable name, this person who had shot him not just once but twice appeared before Feilong's inner eye. In compensation for the lateral gunshot wound, however, Feilong had been able to injure him as well. On the ship, Asami's wound had not yet been fully healed. Feilong wondered whether Asami was aware that his rage when Akihito had been shot had been greater than at the moment he had been shot himself.

"How many others after him did you deceive with this body?"

Yan Tsui rubbed across Feilong's nipples, causing Feilong to furl his eyebrows. The maltreated small buds swelled up redly, and Yan Tsui played with the hard peaks, grinning maliciously.

"After your release from prison, you didn't have anyone supporting you. How did you manage to work your way up to the top of the Baishe in such a short time? It definitely can't have just been one, two men. You're so lewd..."

He indecently ran the gun over the slight bulge in Feilong's pants. Feilong's eyes jerked open, but his expression immediately became adamant again. His emotions momentarily started seething against his will but quickly vanished again, and cold contempt was now ruling his heart.

"What if?"

This firm answer made Yan Tsui doubt, whereas Feilong's feelings remained dull. The meaning of the past years and months now became clear to him.

It was true that Feilong had used people who had been interested in him for his own ends, no matter if man or woman, and he had utilized his body as a means of seduction to get people disturbing the organization out of the way. But that had happened at the time when he had still been his brother's puppet; Yan Tsui himself had forced him to do so, but he disregarded that and instead accused Feilong. He had already once torn off Feilong's clothes and spitefully condemned him because he triggered sexual desire within men. That night had been the elicitor for Feilong to break with his brother, and it had probably been irony of fate that he had encountered Asami that very night. However, now he could say of himself that he did not use his body to seduce others anymore. But he had to try to ruffle Yan Tsui, and put on a faint smile. When Yan Tsui saw that,

he snorted while laughing and looked at Feilong disdainfully.

“P...Phh! I bet you did it with that Japanese as well and used him, didn’t you? Come on and tell me, how did he fuck you?”

It seemed he wanted to restore his balance this way, for the superficiality of his words was undeniable, and he appeared to have realized that too. Irritated, he pressed the gun between Feilong’s legs. His body began to tremble. He knew Yan Tsui’s scornful words only served as a provocation. So as not to endanger Tao, he stifled the urge of wanting to offer resistance and closed his eyes.

“What sounds did you make when you exposed your body to him and he entered you?”

Yan Tsui opened Feilong’s belt so that his underwear was bared before him. Even with his eyes shut, he could feel how Yan Tsui’s gaze wandered over his body. Yan Tsui ran his hand over the underwear and his most vulnerable place, tracing the contours of his cock, and then massaged the spot with the palm of his hand. Feilong knew he would lose if he reacted to that, but he could not bear it any longer.

“Don't...”

“I can’t hear you, Fei!”

Yan Tsui scratched across Feilong’s nipples, making him jolt upward with a jerk. He pinched the redly puffed up nubs so tightly that it felt like he wanted to rip them out. Feilong writhed to escape the pain.

“Asami... didn’t take me!”

“Don’t lie!”

Yan Tsui tossed the gun away, grabbed Feilong by the throat, and began squeezing like a maniac.

“Uuh...!” Feilong’s body grew hot, as if his blood was boiling inside him, and he gasped for breath. His eyes became red, and his pale body squirmed like the one of a snake.

It was not a lie.

With the instinctive fear one is overcome by if one’s own life is in danger, his

memories of that night returned. He had known that it had been a trap by Yan Tsui, but that had not prevented him from going back to the estate. Asami had tried to stop him from doing so. When Feilong had long since accepted being a mere pawn for Yan Tsui, and it had already left him cold, it had been Asami who had reignited his feelings. He was the only one who had ever seen Feilong cry; in front of no one else had he ever been so foolish as to exhibit such behavior.

Asami didn't take me... He could have if he had wanted to. That night I was beside myself, it was pathetic. Asami soothed me with a kiss. He only did it so I would calm down again. But that's exactly why we are still on an equal footing.

Had Asami held him at that time, their power relation would not have been balanced anymore. Feilong would have disdained him as a lecherous man and it would not have been difficult for him to let him go, for sex was nothing more than an act which marked who one belonged to, body and soul. He thought of Asami's words, "Have you become a complete sissy by now?"

He remembered Asami's disapproving glance at their reencounter after Feilong had kidnapped Akihito, and recalled how Asami's inflamed fury had been directed at only him – the thought alone filled him with strange delight, and a sense of satisfaction spread inside him.

"Ph...!" His breathing became restless, and the corners of his mouth twitched upward. He had managed to hurt someone important to Asami. He had not been able to fire a bullet through the Japanese man's heart, but he had definitely inflicted a wound on him with this step.

"Is it painful, Fei? This is nothing, compared to what I had to go through."

Yan Tsui's sardonic laughter sounded sometimes high, sometimes low. Feilong's heart was racing like mad, and he sensed he was slowly losing consciousness. Everything blurred in his head. He opened his eyes slightly; his reflection was visible in the eyes of the man watching him. As though it were being devoured by the murky abyss, the face of his brother shifted itself more and more in front of Asami's.

Do you want... to kill me... Asami?

His misty eyes opened wide as if in a trance. Fear and a marginal fraction of delight spread all over his body, which started convulsing.

Suddenly, the pressure at his throat disappeared. He started to cough and buried his face in the sheets. His lungs were burning as oxygen streamed inside, and his distant, dull eyes still could not perceive reality yet.

“So I barely start talking about him and you’re suddenly on fire? Your body simply is honest, Fei.”

Yan Tsui gripped Feilong’s underwear. Feilong had not realized it, but he was aroused – his underpants stretched so much that it was visible how hard he had gotten. His pants were pulled down to his knees along with his underwear. His manhood, which was sticking out and rocking heavily, was caught by a warm hand, and Feilong rubbed the back of his head on the linen. “Aah...! Ah...!”

Yan Tsui was toying with his tender spot, violently stimulating his erogenous zone. Feilong could not suppress an erotic sigh. He wanted to escape everything, but at the same time his body remembered the tenderness of that night.

I and a man...?! he had thought back then. Asami’s skillful caress had thrown his moral concepts into disarray.

“That guy... did it with you like this!”

Yan Tsui’s trembling voice, sounding upset, mingled with his raw breath. Feilong’s cock was fully erect with a wantonly wet tip; a thick drop stuck to Yan Tsui’s fingers, and every up and down movement was accompanied by shamelessly slick sounds. Feilong felt a warm puff of breath on his oversensitive skin, and his body arched upwards. “Ah!”

Lips pressed on his bare chest. As if he were pecking across his skin, Yan Tsui kissed him over and over, and with each kiss, Feilong’s breath grew wilder. A warm, moist feeling crept across his stomach and touched his blooming buds. With loud noises, Yan Tsui licked his cock, and Feilong’s hand, which was lying under his body, clutched at the sheet.

A...Asami... he called out in his mind. The line between past and present was still blurred, and at some point, the person violating him had exchanged places with a phantasm of Asami.

The weight of the male body leaning over him, the lips running across his skin, the warmth he was sharing – as this unparalleled memory was stirred inside him,

the happenings of that night played out before him once again, and he relived them with all his senses. Through Asami's fierce caress, he had opened his body and revealed his true face, which he had kept hidden away deep inside him. He had disclosed the feelings he had for his family to Asami – something he had never done before – and surrendered himself entirely to Asami's hands stroking his hair.

“Ah... Aah...!” Precome was dripping from his glans ceaselessly, and his need for release grew stronger. He shook his head. His hair, which was spread across the sheet, waved and glistened with sweat. The hallucination evoked by the lack of oxygen was like a drug – it felt good. Feilong's feeling of pleasure gradually reached its peak, and his breath became more shallow and faster, until his seed erupted in one dash. His hip lifted and jerked convulsively, and the cloudy liquid spurted powerfully on his stomach and the sheets.

Slowly, the ecstasy ebbed away, and Feilong exhaled the bottled-up breath of air. He lifted his flushed face with his chest quivering. A sticky noise sounded when the hand released his cock.

“I wonder in what way you took men inside you and pleased them...”

The man's hand was actually supposed to softly stroke over his cheek now, but instead, it spread his legs wide and pushed itself between them. Feilong's eyes widened as it eventually touched a spot at his butt that should not be touched.

“Ah...!” The inside of his thighs cramped to deny the man his advance, and the pain of the forcible penetration let him wake from his delusion.

“Tell me, how did you return his touch?”

Feilong's focus became sharp again, and the blurred shapes cleared up. The man's face appeared; he was relishing in how the opening contracted to repel the intrusion and licked his lips.

It was not Asami.

“Yan Tsui!” Feilong wanted to exclaim; however, he pulled himself together and looked around. Tao was sitting as limp as before in the clutch of Yan Tsui's subordinate. His skin appeared to be injured, since a little blood was shimmering on the blade that was held to his throat.

“Yan... I beg you... Tao should...!”

“You want me to take that Tao boy away from here?”

It was like a slap in the face for Feilong to see Tao in front of him, without knowing when he would wake up again. This seemed to highly delight Yan Tsui.

“I refuse!” He laughed spitefully and pulled back his fingers, then ruthlessly seized Feilong by the shoulders and forced him to turn on his stomach. When he tried to put up resistance, Yan Tsui eventually grabbed his head as if he were a dog and pressed him into the sheets like he wanted to suffocate him.

“Gh...!” Yan Tsui made him assume a position where only his hips were raised, causing Feilong to grimace with humiliation. Yan Tsui had probably planned to take him directly before Tao’s eyes from the start. This distasteful intent made Feilong want to vomit.

“Wake that brat up!”

Yan Tsui’s underling removed Tao’s blindfold. Tao’s eyes were shut, but his face was now uncovered. Feilong called in a husky voice, “Stop it, Yan Tsui!”

He did not want Tao to see Yan Tsui lay hands on him under any circumstances – how much would it hurt Tao’s heart, should he have to bear this sight. Yan Tsui grabbed the writhing Feilong and pulled him close. He was like a predator playing with its prey.

“Is that Tao this important to you?”

At Feilong’s silence, he laughed and continued, “If you spread your legs before me properly like a good boy and obey me, I might consider not waking him up.”

He brushed across Feilong’s exposed hole.

It sickened him; however, if he did not comply with Yan Tsui’s directions, his henchman would carry out the command on the spot. Feilong audibly ground his teeth and opened his legs slightly.

“More! So I can see everything better!”

“You despicable...!”

Yan Tsui answered with a callous laugh. The rustle of him taking off his

underwear made Feilong despair. Knowing that his most fervent wish, to defile Feilong, was finally coming true caused Yan Tsui to rejoice, and he gleefully brought out his sex.

“I’m gonna ravish you till you go crazy!”

If Feilong raised his voice, Tao might wake up from it – he had to do his utmost to avoid that. With his neck curved, he bit down on the sheets. Now he could feel Yan Tsui’s cock at his crevice. In one motion, Yan Tsui rubbed off his precome on his butt and defined his aim. Feilong sensed something was about to enter him. His breath faltered.

He told himself he was not a woman. Sex with the same gender had no meaning at all. The anguish and disgrace the rape was accompanied by would only last as long as the act would take...

But strangely enough, his brother was quite slow to enter him. Did he want to tease him? Feilong peered over his shoulder.

He had been mistaken. The only thing he saw was Yan Tsui’s limp manhood.

Yan Tsui cursed. “Shit!”

For a moment, Feilong did not know what was going on. But then it dawned on him; apparently it was an erectile dysfunction, caused by the excessive use of heroin. Of course the body functions were damaged by the taking of addictive, adulterated drugs, and for men it came into addition that they were not able to maintain an erection.

Yan Tsui began stroking himself restlessly, but nothing stirred. A disapproving click of the tongue sounded. “Dammit! Hey, you! Bring me the stuff!”

He irritably ordered his henchman to bring him his drugs. At first, he looked back and forth between Tao and Feilong hesitantly, but then he put down his knife and moved away from Tao. At this very moment, there was the earsplitting bang of an explosion. The whole building quaked and the illumination flickered. Very faintly, one could hear swift steps through the ceiling, and eventually, all lights went out.

“What’s happening here? A power outage?”

Yan Tsui's subordinate answered his indignant question. "Possibly lightning struck somewhere close by."

"I hope the containers in the warehouse stayed safe though!"

Apart from Yan Tsui's insecure movement away from the bed, Feilong sensed something stirring in the dark, and a slight whiff of gunpowder reached his nostrils in the blackness of the cellar. He stiffened and held his breath.

One, two, three... four... five, he counted in his mind.

The periodically emitted light shock waves caused the air to vibrate. His sharpened sense of hearing perceived the clicking of cartridge casings and a groan, followed by a dull sound, as if something heavy had fallen over, and promptly thereafter, a loud metallic noise was audible, bouncing across the floor. For a few seconds it sounded intermittently, then everything went quiet. The eerie silence was eventually ended when the lights in the room came back on. Simultaneously with the subordinate collapsing to the ground, Yan Tsui jumped back.

"Who's there?!"

Feilong sat up and saw Yoh standing in the door, a gun in his raised hand. "Yoh!"

Apparently, he had taken advantage of the thunderstorm and broken in here. His hair was wet.

"Sorry for the delay!"

Clad in all-black, it was only the bright bloody streaks on his cheek that set colored accents. The previous quake had probably been supposed to serve as an epic diversionary maneuver. Also, the impulse waves had coincided with the number of rowdy men in the office.

"You fucking...!" The sudden appearance of the killer made Yan Tsui rage, but when he was about to lift the gun, Yoh instantly reacted with his right hand, and Yan Tsui's weapon was knocked out of his grip. He clutched his now numb arm and slumped to the ground.

"Don't move!"

Without losing his wariness, Yoh directed the muzzle at Yan Tsui and slid into the room. He was carrying a compact sniper rifle built for melee. The man who had held the knife to Tao's throat was already lying on the floor, dead, and behind the open door, there were more lifeless bodies – probably guards who had belonged to Yan Tsui's men. Every single one of them was marked with a precise shot through the forehead. No one had been given the opportunity to utter a scream.

“Are you uninjured, Master Feilong?”

“Yes!”

Feilong rearranged his clothing. Having gotten up from the bed, he walked over to Tao at once. “Tao!”

He was sitting limply reclined against the chair with closed eyes. Yoh threw a knife to Feilong without turning his weapon away from Yan Tsui, allowing Feilong to sever the rope Tao was tied to the chair with. The thin body, typical for a lanky boy like him, fell into Feilong's arms.

He squeezed him to his chest and whispered into his ear with a sigh, “Everything is all right, Tao!”

He was unconscious, but his breathing was normal. One could tell by looking at the boy how much of a fight he had put up. The mark of one stroke looked especially awful. But even though Feilong's anger was great, the relieving feeling of finally having regained what was important to him prevailed above all. He lifted the unconscious body up and rose in one flowing movement. At this instant, Yoh's grim voice filled the air.

“A cruel thing you have done there.”

At the sight of Feilong's half-naked body, Yoh could guess what had almost happened in this room. Fury flamed up in his cold gaze, and he pointed the gun barrel directly at Yan Tsui's head. Yan Tsui lost his composure and backed off until he was leaning with his back against the wall.

“W...Wait! Who do you think you're talking...?!”

“You were cast out of Hong Kong for the murder of To. I'm surprised you're not dying of shame, doing something like that to your brother!”

Yoh stayed calm – it was Yan Tsui who was becoming nervous. His sunken eyes widened. But the next second, he burst out laughing loudly as if he had lost his mind. “Fu ha ha ha ha! I didn’t kill To! Feilong set all of it up! He pinned everything on me so I was chased away. I should have become head of the Baishe instead of this prostitute!”

“Shut up!”

The sniper rifle at Yan Tsui’s forehead made him fall silent at once. For Yoh, he was nothing more than a rebel who had tried to rape Feilong for his perverted purposes. Yan Tsui seemed to guess his sentiments as well now, and it made him break out in a cold sweat. As if he were a different person, he said in a flattering voice, “P...Please wait! Wait, will you! Do you really think it would be okay to do that? Think about it carefully! I’m entitled to become the successor of the Baishe! If you belong to the clan, the murder of your own kin is a taboo, am I right? You shouldn’t make a mistake now and pledge allegiance to the wrong person!”

The air conditioner was running at the highest level, but Yan Tsui was perspiring an unusually excessive amount. His mind and body were completely corroded. He did not look like one could talk to him reasonably anymore. His incoherent assertions, which were supposed to take the blame away from him, only led Yoh to look at him contemptuously as if he were something dirty.

“I am not connected with the Baishe anymore whatsoever. Feilong alone is my master. I could tell you the same – you should know your manners!”

“Uh, waaah!”

The finger at the trigger tensed. That was too much for Yan Tsui, and he cried out like a madman. At this moment, Feilong shouted, “Stop, Yoh!”

Just in time, Yoh’s finger halted. He looked at Feilong in bewilderment. “Why?! You told me to...”

... kill Yan Tsui in secret. That was the mission. Why, then, did Feilong keep him from doing it? It was justifiably incomprehensible to Yoh. However...

“Not yet.”

Feilong’s desperate glance fell on the face of the boy. “Not before Tao’s

eyes...”

When Tao had been little, Feilong had not seen the similarity, but after his period of growth, his facial features somehow resembled Yan Tsui’s at the time when he had still been a child. Interestingly enough, Tao’s face was even more similar to that of Feilong’s stepfather than Yan Tsui’s, which presently looked tired and haggard.

“This man... Yan Tsui, is Tao’s father.”

“You can’t be serious?!” Yoh cast Feilong a surprised glance.

After a short pause, Feilong went on deplorably, “It’s the truth!”

Even though he had not wanted to play an active part himself, it was him who had devised the plan to take Yan Tsui’s life. And yet he did not want him to be killed in front of his child, even if the outcome was the same. It may only have been ostensible conscientiousness, but he did not want Tao to have to go through the same thing he once had.

“All right, then.”

Yoh saw in Feilong’s expression that it was the truth. He looked back and forth between Feilong and Yan Tsui and temporarily lowered his gun. So Yan Tsui had once again dodged a bullet. One could see how his sweaty neck relaxed. There was no doubt that this big secret was the main reason why Feilong had wanted to keep Tao away from Taiwan. Yoh knew Feilong’s past. He knew his father had been killed before his eyes seven years ago, and that his vindictive feelings towards Asami had fueled him so strongly that he had eventually overcome the shock. And at that very instant, it happened.

“Master Fei?”

Feilong heard a quiet voice and dropped his gaze to his arms with a start. Tao, who had been unconscious just a moment ago, was sitting there with wide eyes.

“Tao?!”

This horrible moment made Feilong freeze. Had he by any chance witnessed the conversation right now? Even though he had said it to stop Yoh, his own carelessness rendered him speechless.

“Master Fei... is that... true?”

“That...”

Just now that Tao had seen Yan Tsui’s twisted soul, Feilong did not want him to learn about it. But how could he deny it now? Stricken by remorse and distress, Feilong struggled for an answer. However, his silence was enough of a response for Tao. He was shattered.

“I’m... his son?”

He slowly turned his gaze away from Feilong, toward Yan Tsui.

Tears flooded his big black eyes, making them resemble the surging sea; Tao’s heart, on the other hand, was swaying like in a storm tide. Without saying a word, he pushed Feilong’s arm aside and was now standing shakily on the ground. The man who had kidnapped and done violence to him was his natural father. On top of that, he was the head of a rival organization. That was even harder to accept.

“Hah...! Ha ha ha!” All of a sudden, Yan Tsui let out a shrill guffaw and proceeded to action. He took the opportunity while the others were distracted by the conversation and kicked Yoh’s arm. Yoh ducked down and leapt to the side. Yan Tsui now pulled his own gun and directed it at Feilong.

“I’m going to kill you!”

“Tao, down!”

Yoh was faster than the bang by a hairsbreadth – he encircled Feilong with his arms and threw himself into the shelter of the bed. Meanwhile Yan Tsui kept shooting indiscriminately and tucked Tao, who had taken cover on the floor, under his arm.

“Tao!”

Yan Tsui perceived Feilong’s pained outcry as gratifying and tightened his grip around the struggling Tao. “Guns away and get out of there! Otherwise I don’t know what I’m gonna do to that boy!”

Feilong screamed when he saw how he held the gun to the boy’s head, “Yan Tsui! I told you! He’s your son!”

“So what!”

Yan Tsui was not discouraged. On the contrary, there was no sign that he intended to lower the firearm again. Feilong and Yoh stayed in the shadow of the bed, but the former was at a loss for words. The life of his own son did not matter to Yan Tsui at all.

“You’re using him as your shield?! You are scum, Yan Tsui!”

Yan Tsui gave a fearless laugh, although he still kept the gun muzzle directed at Tao. “You’re not really different from me, Feilong! You can’t tell me you forgot that you pointed a gun at me seven years ago.”

Feilong remembered how he had threatened Yan Tsui with his weapon when he had no longer been able to stand the tyranny. He could not tell whether it had really been his intention to kill him back then, but he knew that if his subordinates had not held him back, he undoubtedly would have pulled the trigger. Feilong had let Yan Tsui become acquainted with his fierce temper, and Yan Tsui had learned to fear him.

“I’m not like you! I still have feelings, as opposed to you!”

Only later had Feilong learned that it had not been Asami who had shot him, but To. For a long time, he had blamed Asami and tried to thereby keep his emotions under control. He did not want Tao to make the same mistake. He did not want him to bear the same hatred within him.

“Scum or not, the one who survives comes out as the winner. If you don’t want anything to happen to the shrimp, I advise you to come across with the gun.”

Yan Tsui’s state was not normal. Irritating him further would be dangerous. Feilong looked at Yoh with an agonized expression – that seemed to be enough for him to understand.

“All right! We’ll do what you say.”

Yoh stood up slowly and unfastened the sniper rifle from the holster, then he lifted his hands and kicked the weapon away and before Yan Tsui’s feet. Yan Tsui kicked it under the bed, his gun unchangingly at Tao’s forehead, and retreated towards the door step by step. Apparently he wanted to take flight with the hostage as a shield.

“Yan Tsui, let Tao go!”

“Shut up! Come on and get moving, you brat!”

Once, he had murdered his own father, and now he put the life of his son on the line for his own. Yan Tsui’s actions and words, which were more than despicable, let Feilong’s feelings go cold.

“Hey, boy! Didn’t you hear me?!”

That Tao did not stir at all made Yan Tsui impatient. He tried dragging him to the door; however, Tao stood glued to the spot, his eyes wide open but his gaze empty. There were too many shocking truths crashing down upon him.

“This man... who does bad things to Master Fei... is my father?” He stammered the words as if they were but feverish fantasies. The fact that the man who had tried to kill his master was his father was difficult to accept for the smart, gentle Tao.

“You’re my son, ain’t you! Then do as you’re told!”

Just at that instant, he looked up sharply with his damp eyes. Suddenly he showed his white teeth and sank them into the arm which held him. This surprise attack caused Yan Tsui to give a shout. “You damn brat!”

He pushed Tao away from himself and, in the heat of the moment, directed the gun at him ruthlessly.

“Stop!”

Yoh lunged for Tao, who rolled across the floor, and two gunshots sounded almost simultaneously. Empty cartridge cases fell to the floor, and Tao yelled, “Yoh!”

Yoh had fired a shot with a hidden gun, and the bullet flung Yan Tsui’s weapon to the ground. One knee on the floor, Yoh was holding his left shoulder; blood oozed out from under his fingers, dripping to the ground and soaking his shirt. When Feilong saw the red stains, he felt how his emotions froze. He picked up his own gun and pressed it to Yan Tsui’s head, who lay cowering on the floor. His body just acted without him thinking about it.

“Fei... you’re pointing your gun at me again?!”

With pale, blazing eyes, Feilong looked down at Yan Tsui disdainfully and flexed his index finger. “I should have done this seven years ago – without hesitating one second.”

“Wha...?!”

It seemed as though Yan Tsui saw his brother like this for the first time – detached from any kind of reason. The sight brought sweat to his forehead, and dread made his limbs go slack. Feilong observed the situation. The spring cocked creakily. Cold crawled through his brain.

“Master Feilong!”

It was Yoh’s voice that cut through the tension-soaked air. Feilong ceased any motion and looked around.

What he saw were Yoh’s clear eyes in front of him, and he heard him speak, “This is not your task!”

Yoh was giving Tao cover behind his back, and even though he was injured, he was looking up at Feilong, who sluggishly avoided his eyes and let his gaze pause at the boy, who had sunken to the ground. His face was wet due to his tears and full of fear, and the salty drops once again rolled down his cheeks. No sooner had Feilong laid eyes on that than he felt the blood returning to his brain and himself calming down again.

What was I about to...?! he thought.

He almost would have killed Yan Tsui before Tao’s eyes.

Feilong swallowed. Slowly he lowered his weapon and exhaled deeply. His finger on the trigger was cold as ice.

Yan Tsui jumped at the chance and got up, tottering.

“I’ll get you someday! Next time, I’m gonna crush your insides! And this brat right along with it!”

With this threat on parting, he fled from the room, his steps faltering. Feilong frowned but did not take up pursuit. It was not as if he had no energy left for it; maybe he was just shocked at himself so that it was beyond his power to even lift his weapon. He had said he wanted to endeavor not to commit the same

mistake, and yet he had been on the verge of inflicting the same pain on Tao he had suffered seven years ago. His finger at the trigger was numb, as if it had gone to sleep there. He released it and put his gun away. Even though the brothers were not connected by blood, they were still alike – these bestial character traits seemed to be anchored inside him too. He felt revulsion over his loss of control. Suddenly, he heard a dull sound behind him.

“Yoh! Yoh, come on!”

Tao’s cries brought Feilong back to himself. Looking around, he saw Tao trying with all his might to stop Yoh’s bleeding. His hands, which were resting on the wound, were red. Apparently Yoh was already suffering from anemia.

“Tao, let me, please!”

When Feilong addressed the boy, he flinched and looked at him. He was petrified. Never before had he looked at Feilong with such an expression. It was obvious that all the events were still exerting their impact, and it was written in Tao’s terrified gaze just how deeply his tender heart had to have been wounded. Feilong knew that he should actually comfort him now, but there was no time for that. He took over from Tao and inspected Yoh’s injuries. He had been lucky under the circumstances – the bullet had gone straight through him.

“Don’t worry. This is nothing.”

But Feilong did not pay any attention to Yoh’s words and knelt down on the floor beside him. He tore the sleeve of his shirt apart and wrapped the fabric tightly around Yoh’s injury; the enormous amount of blood instantly colored the white cloth red. A bullet that was shot at a body paved its way by ripping muscles to shreds. Of course he was in pain.

“I’m so sorry... It’s my fault! Yoh is gonna die because of me!” Tao sobbed in panic, full of despair, and looked up at Feilong.

“Stop crying! This wound isn’t going to kill me.”

Yoh gave Tao a bold glance, but it could not go without notice that the color of his face did not look good. He was not fatally wounded; however, if the bleeding did not stop, it would become life-threatening. Feilong sighed and rose.

“First of all, we need a place where we can have our peace.”

The odds were small, but it could not be ruled out that Yan Tsui’s supporters would come to retaliate. They decided to temporarily retreat into Yoh’s apartment and left the docks unnoticed.



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Stigma in the Finder III (Finder no Rakuin)

Yoh's flat was in the fifth story of an old apartment block in a dark back alley. The old couple who were also his employers were running a boarding house in addition to the stall, and he had rented a room on the upper floor. It was midnight when they arrived at his home. The other residents of the boarding house were sleeping soundly.

"I'll look after Tao. You can have the bathroom first."

Yoh invited Feilong to do so while placing Tao's by now heavy body on the bed. Right after they had reached the room, the strain had been lifted from him, and he had fallen asleep as though he had passed out. Feilong accepted the offer and washed off the feeling of Yan Tsui's touch in the narrow bath. Afterwards, he felt relieved. He borrowed one of Yoh's shirts and briefly peeked into Tao's room before returning to the living area. Tao's calm breathing was audible. He was fast asleep. Especially in his sleep, the childlike innocence showed on his face. The blow had left behind a bruise on his cheek; Feilong gently brushed across it and then went back to the room Yoh was in with soft steps.

"Yoh?"

In dim light and with naked torso, he was trying to treat his wound. Since he was only able to use one hand, it seemed he was having a hard time.

"Let me do that!"

"It's okay."

Feilong ignored Yoh's reluctance; he took the dressing material out of his hand and sat down on the hard sofa, the synthetic cover crunching at the friction. For Taiwan, the apartment was standardly equipped with a bathroom and a separate bath. Only the kitchen appeared to be used together with the landlord. In the corners were pots and a small refrigerator, which the former inhabitants had left behind. Somehow they did not quite fit into the image. In the fact that he used the furniture of the landlord that did not seem to match his taste at all, Yoh's character of not caring much about lifestyle was reflected.

“I can handle it.”

“Does it displease you to be treated by me?”

Feilong looked at Yoh gracefully in the faint light. Yoh sighed, seeming to have resigned himself to it, and showed him his wound. Compared to before, he was slowly regaining color. Feilong softly touched his muscular chest. It may not have been a life-threatening injury, but the bullet had pierced the upper left part of the arm, and the makeshift bandage to stop the bleeding had been stained dark red. Feilong soaked the absorbent cotton in sanitizer and pressed it on the wound. He could feel Yoh’s muscles convulsing in the process.

So it’s the bullet of a Tokarev... he thought. Since it did not deform in the body, it left little damage, although it was very painful. That Yan Tsui was in possession of high-speed ammunition meant that the Russian mafia was already active. The plan was probably to deal a blow to the Baishe with the supplied weapons and munition they had received from the military as contraband. It was very much like Mikhail to use Yan Tsui as a means to try to throw Feilong out of balance. He sighed and carefully disinfected the wound. The countless scars marking Yoh’s skin told of a past and a present which were unknown to Feilong. Maybe it was because he had undergone an entirely different training, but he felt Yoh was wilder, even though he was just as much a man as him. Unlike Feilong, who was versed in martial arts, which harnessed the body’s agility, Yoh’s body was as hard as steel, and his torso was toned to the maximum to be able to withstand the recoil of a large caliber weapon.

The silence was uncomfortable, which was why Feilong raised his voice. “I told you not to get involved. Why did you still come, Yoh?”

“You are presently my principal.”

This direct answer caused Feilong to look up. Through Yoh’s long hair he could not discern his expression. He pondered, *If he had gone on Asami’s ship back then, he could have escaped...*

However, after Yoh had fulfilled his vow to Asami, he had offered Feilong his remaining life, which was possibly his way of showing his loyalty. A sincere but by no means artful man. Feilong could not really explain it, but when he saw Yoh’s dejected eyes, he became uneasy. As if he wanted to hide his tempestuous

heart, he directed his attention to the deep wound.

“I suppose you're... the curious type...”

Feilong placed a medicine-soaked compress on the injury and began wrapping the bandage over it with care. The corners of Yoh’s mouth did not move. He did not show he was feeling pain. Painkillers one got from the open market only acted as sedation. However, Yoh was apparently already used to such injuries; he had stayed calm ever since he had been shot. He had been like that when Feilong had first met him as well. He had never seen Yoh lose control over his feelings, let alone become nervous. But otherwise it probably would not have been possible to work for Asami.

“What are you planning to do with Tao now?”

Yoh’s quiet words made Feilong pause bandaging briefly.

“Tao has to decide that himself.”

He was faced with the decision of his life. For a thirteen-year-old boy it may have been a hard truth, but now that he had come to know he was Liu Yan Tsui’s son, he had to determine how he wanted to live. At this point, it would not be too late yet to cut all ties with the organization and choose the other side.

“Tao certainly won’t become like you want him to.”

Feilong cropped the end of the bandage when he was done and closed the first-aid kit. Listening to the drizzling rain, he thought that maybe Yoh was right. Even though Tao had learned the truth about his birth – or rather, precisely because he had learned the truth – Feilong could not picture Tao choosing to distance himself from the underworld on his own accord. A weary sigh left his lips.

“It looks like my secret request to prevent Tao from following in my footsteps wasn’t heard.”

When Feilong had once decided to once more take up a path he had lost sight of, he had paid a high price for it, his greatest loss being his stepfather, Liu Talen. His heart was still marked by the tragic past of having been used as political tool by his biological father and then, when he had defied him, having had a weapon pointed at him. And now Tao was about to suffer the same agony as him. Even if

his intent was to protect Tao, maybe keeping him by his side was a mistake; possibly, everything Feilong had done up until now was even cruel for Tao. Dismay and emptiness were taking turns inside him.

“To achieve my goal, I would even take someone’s life. I don’t want to know how Tao looked at me when I pointed that gun at Yan Tsui... Maybe my brother is right and there really is something bestial inside me.”

When the shot had been fired, Feilong’s blood had started to boil. Had Yoh jumped even one second later, the bullet would have hit Tao.

“I wonder what my deceased father would say if he saw me like this now...”

Or was still wanting to be accepted by his stepfather childish? Now, no one could tell anymore what had driven him to take him in. The feelings for his departed stepfather, the guilt towards Tao, and the feud with his brother... Maybe he was so relieved about Tao’s rescue that he could now reveal his true, depressing emotions?

“You’re very warmhearted,” whispered Yoh, who had listened silently.

“Warmhearted?! Me?! Nonsense!” Feilong dismissed the statement scoffingly. In his eyes, Yoh was completely off the mark. Not only had Feilong trampled on his stepfather’s feelings, but now he was also trying to kill his brother to preserve the peace and quiet in the clan – it would have been more natural if Yoh had taken him for someone who did not have any feelings for his family.

“No, I mean...!” When Yoh tried to shuffle his shirt over his left arm, he grimaced. He did not succeed, and the shirt slipped down.

“Don’t overdo it. You must be in pain.”

Feilong put out his hand, and his eyes met Yoh’s. Save Asami, Yoh was the only one he had ever spoken about his true feelings to without reservation. He did not know himself why he had talked about them. Yoh did not belong to the organization anymore, and Feilong regretted that.

Yoh’s thin lips warped into a faint smile. “I never thought the day would come when you’d worry about me.”

“Don’t change the subject!”

He held Feilong's challenging gaze without evading it. An indefinable urge, similar to nervousness, arose inside Feilong, but he concealed those emotions and looked at his former subordinate with a blank mien while trying to calmly find out what was going on in this stiff man. Their eyes still locked, Yoh eventually opened his lips. "It doesn't hurt anymore. You treated the wound well after all."

Feilong remembered Tao's words, "If someone you like treats your injuries, it makes the pain go away."

Strange, that he had to recall that now of all times. He sighed and said, slight self-contempt in his voice, "You took those wounds to save Tao. I bear the responsibility for that."

Actually, Feilong was not someone who felt responsible for a replaceable underling. Yoh had to be aware of that as well. Only after he had uttered it Feilong became conscious of the meaning of the statement that was not like him at all, and it annoyed him.

"That's why I said you're warmhearted."

Feilong could not stand it any longer and averted his eyes. "Stop that!"

He frowned when he noticed the corners of Yoh's mouth were slightly raised, because he thought he was making fun of him at first, but apparently he was wrong.

"You have never committed a mistake. Surely your father would have said the same."

Yoh's face suddenly took on a serious expression, which surprised Feilong. His gaze and words were as though he saw through everything. Feilong stared at him.

How can he say something like that? he thought.

It was an entirely different point of view than Asami's, who had once retorted provokingly that he was denying his own past. Feilong wanted to respond that Yoh had no idea and should not say such nonsense, but he could not put it into words well. He did not understand why it made him so insecure that Yoh had encouraged him in his way of living. Or was he already so desperate that those

words were a relief to him?

“You’re quite forward.”

Feilong got up as if he wanted to tear himself away. He positioned himself before Yoh, who made a puzzled face, and put a hand on the backrest of the sofa. His long hair fell onto Yoh’s shoulder and chest.

“I’m not like I used to be anymore...”

Feilong could not tell whether it was loathing for Asami which marked his heart, or the persistence that had allowed him to strive from the very bottom to the top, but he did not believe the seven years had been in vain. He neither wanted to be acknowledged by anyone, nor did he want sympathy. And yet he badly wanted to feel the warmth of another person now.

“Master Feilong?” Yoh spoke in a rough voice, sounding confused.

Feilong’s dark eyes fixated on Yoh, and the distance between them decreased. A force that threatened to engulf Yoh drove him into a corner, but he could not evade Feilong’s gaze. A blink broke the connection, and Feilong pounced on Yoh’s lips; following his inner urge, he kissed him passionately.

For just one moment, Yoh’s body tensed, but to Feilong’s surprise it did not look like he was going to put up resistance. Feilong closed his eyes and pushed past the unresisting lips. Their tongues touched, and as he bit down teasingly, Yoh sucked on his tongue in retaliation. Now it was him who took the lead, and Feilong shuddered when he proceeded to this counterattack.

“Ph...!” Out of breath, he placed a knee between Yoh’s legs and shifted his weight onto it. He had actually thought Yoh was a thoroughly uptight man, but he did seem to have gathered his experience. Although he looked like he knew little about lust, his tongue did not give Feilong time to take another breath.

“Nh...! Ph...” Their tongues wrestled with each other audibly. Every time they changed the angle to each other, Yoh’s lids opened slightly, and his narrow eyes absorbed Feilong. Inside Yoh, a fire awoke, and he could feel it getting hotter by degrees and gradually threatening to burn him. When their lips parted again, they were at a point where they could not hold back anymore. Feilong breathlessly licked over his own wet lips and rubbed his knee against the bulge in

Yoh's groin area.

"Well... what do we have here?"

The deformation was also visible from above through his clothes. Yoh did not even try to hide it and directed a slightly agonized smile at Feilong. "I'm also just a man."

It was the first time he saw Yoh being this unyielding. Feilong grinned. "Are you perhaps aroused because of me?"

With this remark, he was making fun of Yoh's reaction. Yoh, however, seemed to be displeased that he was playing with his desire and his feelings. His right hand encircled Feilong's hip, and he pulled him close daringly. Feilong dodged Yoh's injury and knelt down over his thighs in front of him. They were so close to each other that their breath almost touched. Yoh's even and beautiful face came nearer. The sudden acceleration of his heartbeat was an unprecedented delight. His body heat, which reached Feilong through the fabric, was higher than his own. The scent of a mixture of cigarettes and gunsmoke wafted to his nose. All that aroused Feilong, and all inhibitions were dropped.

"You want me to answer that? Even though you stole my heart..."

"This mouth should be sealed."

Following the surging emotions, he quickly seized Yoh's cheeks and covered his lips as though he meant to devour him.

Feilong only wanted some comfort. He felt like the man before him, who gave him just the words he wanted to hear, would satisfy his momentary passion. He wanted to let those feelings be unleashed and evaporated. Tonight was a night in which Feilong craved warmth, and Yoh was by his side. Without wanting to, he drowned in Yoh's provoking gaze.

"Hah...!" Their tongues entwined together, and Feilong ran his fingers across Yoh's body. Yoh also stretched out his uninjured arm and deftly unbuttoned Feilong's shirt. With every movement, the cheap spring of the sofa creaked. They could feel through their skin how their hearts were beating faster and faster. "Nh...!"

So as to take the pressure off Yoh's injury, Feilong tensed his right hand, which

he had laid on Yoh's shoulder. His wounded body easily slid from the rest to the seating surface so that he was now lying on his back, and Feilong, who had taken off his underwear, sat down on his thighs. Yoh wordlessly studied the sight, like a wild animal about to attack the prey in front of it. Feilong brushed his palm over Yoh's heated crotch and licked his lips.

"You're so hard... that's quite indecent of you."

He loosened the front part of Yoh's pants and grabbed his emerging rigid cock. Yoh held his breath; the tremble of his abdominal wall was tangible. He was so excited that his penis continued to swell, and fluid was seeping like nectar from the tip. The way the transparent beads trickled down the peak stirred their desires.

"You are going on the offensive quite a bit after all..." Slightly short of breath, he looked up at Feilong, who had opened his shirt. He perceived it as insolence that Yoh was talking so big despite the fact that he had gotten an erection just by thinking about what would come next.

"If you can satisfy me for this night, I shall forgive you for everything."

Yoh responded to this provocation and lifted his head. He caught a strand of hair that had fallen onto his chest, guided it to his mouth, and softly pressed his lips on it. It was as though he were kissing Feilong's skin directly, and the illusion caused Feilong to swallow.

"I don't think you will forgive me, but I won't stop, even if you can't take it anymore."

He looked at Feilong, his gaze directed upward. That day on the ship deck when Yoh had said he would not ask for forgiveness, his dark eyes had been clear. Heat arose inside Feilong, who was almost beside himself. He straightened his torso, and the strand slid from Yoh's hand. Feilong did not care if he thought this was just an eccentric whim; he only wanted to see Yoh, whose features never slipped him, lie underneath his body and lose his composure with lust. He reached out his hand, took an ointment from the medical kit to use in place of lubricant, and smeared the content onto his fingers. "Hmh...!"

With one hand he propped himself up on Yoh's chest, and with the other he began widening his anus with his fingers. As he opened his eyelids slightly, a

moan escaped him. Yoh was watching him without even blinking.

“Hah...!” Feilong wondered how he saw him right now, when he was mounting a man so indecently. Panting, his brow covered in sweat, he withdrew his fingers again. He spread his anus and slowly lowered his hips, then he brought Yoh’s hot cock into position and tried to swallow him up.

“It’s too tight, isn’t it?”

Yoh put out an arm to keep him from further engaging in this ill-advised activity, but Feilong was no weakling one had to be worried about. He sharply looked at Yoh with narrow eyes and said, “Don’t move!”

Feilong carefully moved his hip in circles and let Yoh’s cock sink into him inch by inch. Yoh complied and abided. Sometimes, a sigh was heard from him. Did it arouse him? As if out of his senses, Feilong endured the wild manhood pushing its way inside him and taking his body. He had thought he would never again experience the pain and pressure of being penetrated by the same sex. While trying to control his feeling of lust and thus maintain his pride, he had managed to take in Yoh’s manhood halfway.

“Hah! Uh...” He put a hand on Yoh’s chest and moaned once more.

In the room next to them, Tao was sleeping. They were separated by only a wall. Feilong could not allow it that the boy learned what was happening in this room. Yoh seemed to be worrying about that as well and contracted his brows with effort. Only a little bit more. The instant that Feilong lowered his hip, a slick noise sounded.

A quiver climbed up his back, and the pain of the thrust made him close his eyes. At the moment when he leaned back, he became even tighter, and Yoh groaned. The flat, rapid breathing of the two men filled the room. It was not just down to temperature that their bodies were bathed in sweat; they also were stoking each other up. For a moment, Feilong tried to calm his breath again, and then he slowly opened his eyes.

“And... how do you like it? Now there’s no turning back.”

Yoh let out a suggestive sigh and raised his eyes. He laughed, “Then let me try more!”

“You’re honest.” The corners of Feilong’s mouth raised. He wedged Yoh’s hip, which was trying to undulate upward, between his knees, and as if he wanted to tease him, he slid his pelvis back and forth. Meanwhile Yoh looked at him with a frown, like he had a sly woman in front of him.

“Feilong...”

“A wounded person should behave as such and lie there obediently.”

Feilong controlled Yoh, who made attempts to move, and pressed his body harder against him. Yoh’s tormented sigh briefly made him forget the pain. This sex had no meaning at all. They were merely following their urges. And when the climax was reached, the deed would wash away the accumulated dirt at its own ground. But even though Feilong thought about it like this, the body he was connected with was very warm, and he had difficulty letting it go. Complying with his desire, he started moving his pelvis. Apart from the faint panting, one could hear the bodies rubbing up against each other. Every time Feilong rolled his hips, the tip of his own cock leaked. The motions gradually became more fluent.

“Ah... Aah...!” He gave a moan and tried to abandon himself to the pleasure. The opening Yan Tsui had not been able to invade was now soft and wholly encompassed Yoh.

“Master... Fei...long...!”

Eventually, Yoh could not stand it any longer and adapted to the rhythm; he looked for the sensitive spot and thrust upward. Feilong touched Yoh’s sweaty chest. It was not too bad a sight, seeing a stoic man with eyes moist from sensual pleasure. He looked Yoh in the face, which was contorting with desire, and laughed ruthlessly, “A nice face you’re making there. Does it feel that good... Yoh?”

“I could ask you the same!”

At some point, the rain outside had ceased. The moon was shining through the mottled clouds.

Yoh’s well-toned body was marked with several fresh scars and yet was still aesthetically pleasing. They were frantically panting out the sweet agony, their

overlapping shadows wavering. Suddenly, Yoh raised his right hand and touched Feilong's neck. On the throat, the bruises from Yan Tsui's fingers were still visible, and the scar on his chest was exposed as well, just like his slightly flushed white skin. He offered all this to Yoh's eyes and drowned in his appreciation.



“So beautiful...”

Yoh’s words were not ornate, which made Feilong a little flustered. He bit his lips and closed his eyes as though he wanted to escape Yoh’s gaze with it.

When he surrendered his consciousness to the abyss of lust in this manner, he was just a normal man. He was neither the boss of the Baishe, nor Yan Tsui’s stepbrother, nor the illegitimate son shunned by his natural father. He was only the man Liu Feilong.

“You are very beautiful... and you have a warm heart.”

“I told you not to... Ah...! Ah...!”

Yoh ran his hands across Feilong’s neck to the collarbone and over the old gunshot wound beneath it. All the spots he touched felt like they were catching fire, and the place where he entered him twitched. Yoh’s wandering fingers were trailing a flaming trace behind them, and when they brushed across the nipples, Feilong’s heart skipped a beat. “Ah...!”

He bent his head back. His hole was soft and clutching Yoh tightly; his muscles contracted and squeezed around him, which disrupted the rhythm, and Yoh’s cock reached the spots which excited Feilong. Lightning shot through his head.

“Do you like it here?”

Yoh was looking at him like he wanted to devour him with his glances. His eyes were moist. This was no longer the man Feilong knew as subordinate – before him, he saw the face of a man who did not hide his carnal desire. He could not answer, but Yoh did not let up.

“And how about here?”

“Well... it’s not... so bad...”

Feilong reacted stubbornly, because he did not want Yoh to know how much he aroused him. Thereupon Yoh’s brow furrowed, and he thrust inside. Harder this time.

“Ah... ah...!”

His skin rosy-tinted, engulfed by the sensual pleasure, Feilong contemplated.

He wondered how those seven years in which he had worked for him day after day had been for this man. When everything had been over and Yoh had handed Feilong the weapon on board of the ship, he had been prepared for being punished with death. Maybe Yoh had wanted to be killed by him, just like Feilong had wanted to be killed by Asami, back then.

He let himself be rocked back and forth and muttered quietly to himself while drifting on the heat, “Hah...! Why... didn’t I... kill you back then?”

Had he drawn the consequences from Yoh’s actions at that time, this moment would not exist. Why had he been unable to pull the trigger, like he had done with Asami? Normally, Feilong would not have forgiven anyone who had betrayed the organization, yet back then he had just not been able to bring himself to pull the trigger, and not only because Yoh’s dauntlessness had cast a chill over his intent to kill him, but maybe also because Feilong had seen the bond between Asami and Akihito, which was so strong that no one could sever it. However, what had swayed Feilong’s heart the most was Asami’s true intention when he had made him lower his weapon – not the intention to kill him, but to leave him alive. It was not scornful pity that had prompted Asami to do it. No matter how much Feilong had thought about it, he had not been able to get behind the reason why, and when Asami himself had told him, it was as if the evil spirit which had possessed Feilong had suddenly disappeared. For the first time it had dawned on him then that it had been nothing but his delusions which had driven him to chase Asami.

“Feilong...”

Yoh’s raw voice caused a shiver to trail down his spine. By dropping the courteous form of address he signified their equality, and although Feilong did find it a little presumptuous of him, it did not bother him. Was that part of his change of heart too? The feelings of other people did not let themselves be controlled – no matter how much someone was oppressed, the heart could not be commanded. Nevertheless, Yoh had not returned to Asami after leaving the Baishe. It seemed Feilong had finally been able to accept this fact.

“I’ve... changed...”

The past months and years had not been for nothing after all. A smile

resonated in Feilong's sigh. He had thought that sex with the same gender meant nothing more than settling the ranks among one another, but now he knew that it was not just that. He had learned that it was not necessarily solely repression through power, but could also be a connection based on trust.

Then Yoh's husky voice sounded. "But my feelings haven't changed – and they won't change either."

At that moment, it was Feilong who was being reflected in Yoh's misty eyes, and his fervent gaze disclosed his profound emotions much more directly than some worn out declaration of love. Just one small mistake and Feilong would have made him pay for his treason with his life. Did Yoh want to give his heart to such a man?

Still connected with him, he reached out and brushed across Feilong's hair. His gentle touch now no longer reminded him of someone else.

When Yoh was about to withdraw his fingers, Feilong caught hold of them unconsciously.

"Feilong?"

Yoh's heat awakened a sweet, pulsing ache inside him. This man's body was so warm that it was difficult for him to get away from it. For the first time, Feilong realized that all of this had affected him more than he was aware of. He lifted his chin and looked down at Yoh with glistening eyes.

"Your hip isn't moving anymore."

Yoh's initially somewhat worried eyes widened slightly, and the next moment he was grinning. Feilong's tense hips were seized by his hands, and he thrust into him violently.

"Ah, nh...!"

Yoh's cock left Feilong and rammed back deep into him again, coupled with the sound of skin on skin. Feilong flexed his white neck and pressed a hand to his mouth, and with each thrust, his pale back arched. The pleasure was too intense; it was robbing him of his senses. The border between fantasy and reality blurred. To smother his voice, Feilong bit his thumb and twisted his lithe body. "Ah... ah...!"

Like a dragon devouring a human, he insatiably swallowed up the man. His hair was dancing with the vigorous rhythmical movements, and the sofa creaked. The inner muscles did not let go and tried savoring the man to the fullest, and Feilong could feel how greedily he was twitching inside him. He ground his nails into Yoh's arms, which were holding his hips firmly, and left behind red crescents. With each quiver, the peak drew nearer.

"Kh...! Uh...!"

Yoh groaned quietly. His arms clutching Feilong's hip tensed up, and the short nails pressed themselves into the skin. Just then he wanted to pull out, but Feilong did not let him and instead made him sink even deeper into his body. He could feel Yoh's manhood spasming inside him convulsively.

"Ah...!" Raw, heated moans poured from Feilong's lips. He could not hold back anymore. A warm substance was released inside of him; he took what belonged to Yoh, and it caused his entire body to tremble. His cock convulsed spasmodically and scattered a white trail on Yoh's skin, and when his whole body shuddered in ecstasy, Feilong sighed contentedly.

The cloudy liquid trickled along the wounds of the past and ran down the skin. The lewd scenery was burning in Feilong's eyes, and he brushed back his hair, which was sticking to the sweat. He looked at the exhausted Yoh, who was completely out of breath, and thought he spotted defeat in his face. Maybe he was sulking because he had not been able to take on the leading role until the very end. Feilong looked down at the man who was indulging in the aftermath of the act and could not suppress a smile.

"Ph...!" A laugh left his mouth like a sigh.

He had managed to win over the man who had once belonged to Asami. When he thought about it like that, a sense of conquest overcame him. Even among Feilong's men there were not exactly few who tried to ingratiate themselves with him, and he was permanently subjected to sleazy looks; however, Yoh had always stood a step away from it and observed everything with a distant mien. Feilong knew it was conceited, yet he could not hold back a chuckle.

"Why are you laughing?" Yoh asked.

"Well..." was all Feilong replied.

Yoh probably did not like that he evaded his question. He slipped a hand around Feilong's neck and pulled him close so that his hair fell down. Following gravity, their lips met, and Yoh's tongue instantly invaded Feilong's mouth; in contrast to the rough kiss, the touch with which he stroked over his hair was very soft. The flame inside Feilong was on the verge of flaring up again, and he lightly pushed Yoh away by the chest. Still panting heavily, their lips parted. Feilong's shoulders shook, and he gasped for air.

Slowly, he lifted his hip. He could feel Yoh's slick manhood sliding from the place where he had clenched around him, and when his long cock had come out of him, the ropey seed dripped behind. A low groan was audible.

"I feel honored if I could please you with my work."

In response to Yoh's words, Feilong merely moved his head and looked upon him. In the upright kneeling position, he was gazing down at the smug expression on Yoh's face.

While they were staring at each other like this, Feilong unexpectedly had to laugh. "Well, let's give it a pass, then."

Yoh's arms wrapped around his hips and gently pulled him close. Feilong told himself he was only putting up with this because the physical strain was still affecting his body. Neither the sweaty skin nor the scalding heat bothered him.

It happened the moment their lips were about to touch once more. All of a sudden, they heard a faint noise. They halted in alarm and, holding their breaths, squinted through the darkness like wild animals. The room was silent. Nothing seemed to have changed. Then they noticed that the door, which should have been shut, stood slightly ajar and was swaying in the wind. It was as if the air was electrified.

"Please stay here!" Yoh said and sharpened his focus. As though he wanted to protect Feilong, he got up and picked up his gun. He positioned himself with his back sideways at the door, but revoked the warning again right away.

"Yoh...?"

He quietly closed the door. Having taken a water bottle from the fridge, he returned as if nothing had happened. His expression was back to normal.

“The door doesn’t close properly.”

A draft through the crack seemed to have opened it. Feilong exhaled quietly and wet his throat with the water Yoh had given to him. As though they had never had passionate sex with each other, they now sat with a certain distance to one another, yet the atmosphere surrounding them was not a listless one, and time was passing by peacefully.

“Just sleep if you feel up to it. Even if it’s just briefly.”

The way Yoh found a way through the tears in Feilong’s weakened heart was pleasant. He wordlessly closed his eyes, and while feeling the closeness of someone else beside him, he inhaled and exhaled slowly. Surprisingly, breathing was easy to him. It was not like he had felt restricted, and yet in Hong Kong, his escort followed him everywhere; there was no time to relax. But Feilong suddenly arrived at the conclusion that Yoh in this daily routine was like air to him, so impalpable and yet indispensable.

That reminds me, I’ve felt something similar once before – when I left the house of my clan and defied my brother for the first time, he thought.

He had felt guilty towards his men and his father because he had caused them trouble, but on the other hand, his mood had brightened up as he had eloped with the fugitive Asami. It had been a liberation of the soul. When he reflected on it now, they owed the days they had spent together to their imprudence, his own as well as Asami’s. They had been young back then. He did not think it had been naive to trust Asami while standing at the crossroads of his life, but even now, his existence churned up Feilong’s heart.

Yoh was different. Unlike Asami, he always was the epitome of calm – and he had not only been like that when they had met in jail. He had indifferently obscured his presence and merely accompanied Feilong, Yoh’s private life separated as though by a wall at all times. He was arguably the person who knew Feilong’s true face the best. To express it positively, one could say Yoh was sincere, but otherwise put, it was impossible to tell what he was really feeling deep inside. Feilong did not want to know either. He shifted slightly and carefully opened his eyes. Leaned against the sofa, Yoh was watching silently over his resting body. Nothing of the previous passion was visible in the stoic profile of

this man; his face was like it had been before, a flat mask without personal feelings. Feilong closed his eyes once more and drifted off to a light doze for a short while.

Light fell upon his eyelids, and he awoke. It was quiet in the room.

“Yoh?”

No reply. He squinted his eyes in the face of the sunlight streaming through the window and into the room. Then he straightened his upper body, which was lying on the armrest of the sofa.

Morning in Taiwan began early.

A thin blanket slid to the floor – when he had been covered with it he did not know. In these unfamiliar surroundings, Feilong once more recalled the events of yesterday. He was worried something bad might have happened, but then he saw a note on the table which said that his host was away briefly, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Nevertheless, he could not imagine that Yoh was able to walk around without impairment after yesterday’s injury. It had been a penetrating gunshot wound; however, if he were to overstrain himself, the damage possibly would not be able to be fixed anymore.

Is Tao still sleeping? In that case, I’d rather let him sleep, Feilong thought.

After having provisionally combed out his disheveled hair, he slowly stretched his sleepy body, lit by the morning sun. He put up his hair with his hands, and just then, the door opened. Yoh entered, loaded with a big bag he was carrying in his right hand. The white bandage looking out from next to his shirt collar filled Feilong with regret.

“Yoh!”

“You’re awake?”

It smelled like warm food – apparently he had gone out to get breakfast.

“How is your injury?”

“That’s no big deal... What about you?”

This casual courtesy made Feilong think back to the fervent night. It pervaded his body like damp sultriness, but surprisingly enough, it was not an unpleasant

exhaustion. Instead, his spirit and body felt light. Maybe it was because he had finally released everything that had accumulated. Even when he thought about Yan Tsui now, his heart no longer stirred tumultuous waves anymore.

“I’m fine,” Feilong replied. “But that’s not important. With that shoulder you can’t...”

“I took a day off from work, so don’t worry about that.”

Yoh beat him to the punch with his answer. And yet, from his easygoing conduct, one could also get the idea that he wanted to preferably avoid a conversation regarding last night.

“I see...”

Maybe Yoh regretted it. That could only work in Feilong’s favor. Then it could be dismissed as a one-time matter.

During a long silence, he observed Yoh skillfully preparing the food on the table.

“Good morning... Master Fei, Yoh!”

When Tao saw the two of them, he made a shy face. The cheek Yan Tsui’s underling had hit was a tad reddened, but other than that, he seemed to be all right.

“Thank you so much for saving me yesterday. I’m sorry... that I caused you worries and you got hurt because of me.”

He involuntarily looked over to Yoh. Compared to the previous day, when he had not been able to speak anymore due to the shock, he seemed to have calmed down today. It was written all over his face that he very much repented his actions of simply having followed Feilong.

“I’m glad nothing happened to you, Tao! But now you can promise me not to act this carelessly anymore in the future, right?”

“You aren’t angry with me?”

“No, I’m not. But I was very worried!”

When Feilong looked at him with his usual smile, Tao raised his face

determinedly. Relief in his voice, he apologized once more, “I’m sorry!”

In passing, Yoh petted Tao’s head in a casual gesture. “Go wash your face! Let’s have breakfast before it gets cold.”

As soon as Tao caught sight of the table, his eyes started to shine, and he dashed out of the room. Although he was not as depressed as feared, he hardly could have calmed his heart overnight – Feilong could only guess what was going on inside Tao, but he could see he was making an effort to act lively.

“Here, take this before the meal.”

Yoh placed a tea bowl on the table in front of Feilong. Inside, a beverage was sloshing which came very close to the brown color of coffee; however, the aroma did not remind him of it at all.

“What is that?” asked Feilong.

“Just try it,” replied Yoh.

The color was passable, and this special scent, resembling the one of old Chinese medicine, seemed familiar to Feilong. His interest was piqued, so he took a sip. He furled his eyebrows. The strong odor climbed up his nose, and he felt nauseous. He suppressed the urge of spitting the tea back out and swallowed the drink.

“Yoh!”

“That’s traditional Taiwanese medicine.”

Upon this remark, Feilong stared at him sharply while holding his mouth shut with his hand. The corners of Yoh’s mouth twitched, and he handed Feilong a glass of water, all the while looking like a child whose prank had been successful. This beverage lived up to the name bitter tea – its taste was so harsh that one’s mouth tightened. In one fell swoop, it freed all senses and helped to think clearly. There may have been people who were completely obsessed with that taste, but for someone who was used to drinking the Chinese tea Tao always made, it was a sensory overload. Feilong snatched the glass from Yoh’s hand. Having drunk up, he exhaled in relief.

“It seems to me your character has changed since you’ve come to Taiwan.”

“I’ve always been like this.”

If this was supposed to be Yoh’s true face, then he must have held back a lot during his time in the Baishe. What else should be expected? But for some reason, Feilong’s soul ached.

Shortly after, Tao came back and took a seat at the table. Like this, the three of them were sitting around the breakfast. Tao was in extraordinarily good spirits, which possibly was because all of them were eating together – to him, it was perhaps something like a family breakfast. But if it cheered him up, it was not a bad thing, Feilong thought. He did not really know how to deal with it himself since this odd situation would have been inconceivable at their residence in Hong Kong. Yet somehow, he was also having fun with it.

“Master Fei, what’s that? That’s a terrible smell!”

Tao was curious about the bitter tea and looked up at Feilong, who hastily tried to stop him by reasoning he was too young for it, but it was too late.

“I wanna try it!”

And before Tao had finished his sentence, he was already holding the tea in his hand. He took a gulp like he were dying of thirst and let the liquid run down his throat. As expected, his eyes grew huge. “Bitter!”

He willed himself to swallow, but at the same time, the tea went into his trachea, and tears welled up in his eyes. For a child it was probably too intense a taste after all.

“It promotes your health.”

But without paying attention to Yoh, Tao darted out of the room, with a grimacing face and wet eyes. He had most likely run outside to rinse his mouth. Feilong listened to his scuffling steps and sighed, “You bought quite a lot.”

On the table were things like radish mochi, soy milk soup, fried bread, stuffed rice balls, and steaming manju. Even considering the fact that there were three of them, it was almost enough to open a shop with. Yoh immediately saw through Feilong’s train of thought and said teasingly, “I thought that with this much to choose from, there ought to be something there the two of you like. The taste of the people, as they say. If you haven’t gotten around to enjoying the

food stands in Taiwan yet, I want to warmly invite you to try these things here – provided that there is something that’s to the liking of the boss of the Baishe.”

The implication that he was treating him like a princess annoyed Feilong. With childish stubbornness, he took up the chopsticks and said, “Enjoy your meal, then!”

He tried the danbing without delay. For the Taiwanese, the steaming danbing belonged to a typical breakfast. A flatbread was formed from dough which looked like the dough of wonton, and fried together with beaten egg and vegetables. Danbing did not necessarily look pretty, but the simple taste was by no means bad. There was something unique about the consistency in the mouth – crispy on the outside, soft on the inside. Together with the sweet Chinese chili sauce or the spicy bean paste, a particular, intense taste stimulating the appetite spread in Feilong’s mouth. If he were asked whether it was to his liking or not, his answer would be...

“It’s good! I like it!”

With this turbulent morning, he had completely forgotten that he had not eaten anything since last night. He saw how the manju was steaming before him, stuffed with sweet-and-spicy boiled down meat and vegetables; his empty stomach had awakened a great appetite in him for the unusual dishes. Yoh contentedly looked upon the food.

“You seem to like it better than I thought. The guabao here is tasty, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, totally!” replied Tao, who had sat back at the table, and instantly stuffed something into his mouth. This image made one want to laugh. The appetite of boys during puberty was astounding, and Tao, having gained a lot of body height lately, was currently in that phase. It was nice to watch how he forgot talking, all immersed in the meal.

In the end, Tao had simply gobbled up the enormous amount of food. Now that his belly was full and his mind assuaged, he looked a little happier than before.

“Yoh, I’ll help you!”

After they had ended the strange breakfast, Tao rose from his chair. He cleared

the table; assisted Yoh, who could not move his left hand as normal; and prepared the tea.

“Yoh, what’s that tea called?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t pay attention to that when I bought it...”

Apparently, Yoh made it easy for himself and did not first fill the teapot to then pour the content back into the bowl. Instead, he simply took the tea leaves and put them into the gaiwan*. Tao was watching, slightly confused. [*tea bowl with a lid]

“I’ve never seen that...”

Not just the method, but also the shape of the tea leaves was new to him. It was not by any means exaggerated to say that exclusively the tea Feilong consumed in his rooms was brewed by Tao, and thus Tao’s knowledge about Chinese tea and the associated etiquette was very slim. Just as he had learned languages from an early age and dedicated himself to studying, his strong will seemed more than helpful to Feilong here as well.

“Here in Taiwan, it’s nothing unusual.”

“I see...”

Tao took the tea he had taken out with the spoon into his hand and scrutinized it more closely. He sniffed at the thinly crinkled leaves and then smiled contentedly. “That smells nice and sweet! Where do you get that?”

While pouring hot water into a gaiwan with a blue dragon on it, Yoh retorted, “Do you plan to make that tea in Hong Kong for your beloved Feilong?”

“That...”

Normally, Tao would already have nodded joyfully by now, but he paused and looked away from Yoh and over to Feilong. With his head hanging, he answered in a mumble that this was not the case.

This never before seen behavior unsettled Yoh, but if he took into account that Tao was at a difficult age at the moment, he could muster up understanding. On top of that, he had been swept up in a storm of conflicts in a foreign country – surely his heart was thrown off balance. Until his emotional condition was stable

again, he would probably need some more time. Without teasing Tao any further, Yoh wrote down the type of tea and the place where one could buy it on a slip of paper.

“If you wanna buy tea, there’s a good shop two blocks from here. There you can pick out even better tea leaves than these here. But don’t ever go to the shop near the station!”

“Why?”

“The tea there is expensive and bad.”

“Did you already try it, Yoh?”

“Well!”

At Yoh’s elusive answer, Tao puffed up his cheeks. This childish demeanor was heartwarming.

Induced by Yoh’s smile, Feilong tore his gaze away from the scene. Fate was a network of gear wheels that were interlocked with each other, but if one of those cogs was missing, it could strongly influence a person’s life. He could not picture how the life in a normal family went. But maybe the daily routine of such a family was very similar to the scenery they were having here.

“There you go!”

When Yoh served him the gaiwan, Feilong returned to reality. He slowly let his gaze roam: from the rough fingers to the heavily muscled chest that was covered by the shirt, from the broad shoulders right up to the expressionless face.

Yoh belonged in the other world. Unfeeling, without even hesitating, he could take the life of another person if the order told him to; with cold rationality he avoided trusting others. On the other hand, Feilong knew that those fingers that could accurately eliminate a target were unexpectedly hot and thirsting for something.

“Master Feilong?”

As though he wanted to tear himself away, Feilong stretched out his hand for the served tea. He gingerly lifted the bowl, and a grass-like aroma reached his nostrils. Having shifted the lid, he pressed his lips against the thin earthenware.

Yoh was watching him silently. In his deep black eyes, Feilong could see a flash of the passion that only he knew. That was the certain proof for him that yesterday's night with him had neither been a dream nor a fantasy, which made him feel complacent. They would take the assassination on Yan Tsui and the secret about Tao's origins to the grave, and the traces of the time spent together would also remain solely in their memories. Whether they forgot them or not was left to their own devices. It may have seemed as if the night had not had any meaning, but that was not all bad either. Feilong slowly sipped the hot beverage. Unlike the Chinese green tea Biluochun, for which only the soft cores of spring buds were used, Yoh's green tea was very strong, almost rough, but once it was on the tongue, a deep, hidden taste unfolded itself.

"You're quite skillful. I didn't expect that."

"Does it taste good?"

It seemed he had not expected that a simple green tea would be acknowledged by Feilong. Yoh, who was standing there quietly, looked surprised and shrugged his shoulders. But then Feilong noticed that Tao was making an unhappy face, and put the gaiwan down. "It's not bad. But Tao's tea still agrees best with me after all..."

He gave Tao a gentle look. Tao's expression changed in next to no time, and his eyes were sparkling, a shy smile playing around his lips. Maybe he was feeling insecure. Feilong did not know if he should be happy about the fact that Tao was starting to develop rivalry towards Yoh. He reached out and opened the cover of the gaiwan; the tea leaves had sunken to the ground and looked like one of those artificial flowers that opened as soon as they were put in water. When he brought the bowl close to his mouth, his breath caused slight ripples in the water. The mild green tea flowed down the throat with a pleasant fragrance.

"Ah..." he sighed softly.

It felt as though the worries pent up in his heart were carried along and slowly sliding downwards. He had already felt this lump in his throat since arriving in Taiwan – no, even longer. The uneasiness now streamed into his stomach, and warmth spread. Mind and body cleared up, and the past was replayed before him like a film in fast motion. At the end of his reverie, he remembered the

events on the casino ship.

“You won’t get what you wish for.”

After seven years, he now finally knew the meaning behind it.

What I wish for... he thought. Maybe he had already been aware of it long ago.

He had wished for someone he could walk through this dark world hand in hand with. He realized that this was also the reason why he had always longed for Asami, although he had hated him at the same time, and why he had been rejected by him.

Asami desired a person who was living far away from the underworld. Takaba Akihito. What Asami now had been able to win for himself and what Feilong yet wanted to win for himself were opposites. Through the darkness and the conflicting feelings Feilong had been carrying inside him, he had involved people who otherwise did not have anything to do with the criminal world, and blood had been shed unnecessarily.

When he thought about it now, he realized that the whole affair must have been a distressful trauma for Akihito, and in spite of that, he had not let that get him down and had forgiven Feilong for his actions. Eventually, Akihito had even protected him from Asami and jumped in front of his gun. Feilong had seen how Asami embraced Akihito, and the sight had elicited a mixed feeling of defeat and understanding. He had not been able to do anything about it. At that very moment, his heart had frozen. Asami had directed the gun at him, yet Feilong had not defended himself but rather just stood there. Maybe it had been an act of desperation. He had not cared if Asami were to kill him at that point. Had Akihito not returned the deeds of ownership, he would have lost the reason to draw a line under the matter. What would have happened with him then?

“Aah...” he sighed to himself.

Fragments of the regret over having been unable to gain something that he had wanted to possess melted and dissolved. In the future as well, he and Asami would probably not tread the same path anymore.

As leader of the Baishe, as successor of the Liu family, Feilong would do what was his duty. The way he had lost out of his sight he now saw clearly in front of

him again.

“Master Fei?”

When he returned to his senses, Tao was looking at him from across the table. The long silence had probably worried him. Deep in his eyes, Feilong could see how hurt he was, yet he laughed to reassure him.

“What is it, Tao?”

Tao was trying to be the same as always so as not to trigger the concern of the adults, but now and then they could see how he became pensive. It was perceptible how tormented his heart was.

“You looked so sad, Master Fei.”

With those unexpected words, he stood up from his chair, a very mature countenance reflecting in his features, and he came to Feilong’s side.

Feilong replied, “Why, no...”

Tao’s former lively attitude had been nothing more than the demeanor of a child that grew up among adults. However, since he had now learned the truth about his birth, he was forced to take the step into the adult world.

“Master Feilong...” Tao knelt down on the floor and took one of Feilong’s hands, who was sitting on the chair. He looked up at him as if he wanted to ask for forgiveness. “May I stay by your side?”

“Yes, but of course!”

“Will you allow me to stay by your side... later on, too... even when I grow up?”

Feilong held his breath and looked down at Tao with a firm gaze. He was not sure what exactly Tao’s thoughts were, but should this be the path he had found for himself, it would mean that he would go the same way Feilong had chosen seven years ago. It was too early to take the decision of a thirteen-year-old child who had grown up without the love of his parents as final; however, Feilong could not discern the naivety of a child in Tao’s eyes. The fact that he was Yan Tsui’s biological son could not be changed. He would continue to suffer from the truth that the man who had tortured and attempted to kill his adored Feilong was his real father. But if Tao wanted to accept his mafia blood nonetheless and

go on living with it, Feilong would welcome the decision.

“If that’s what you want to do, then... I would be happy about it.”

He took Tao’s soft hand and smiled. He isolated all emotions he was carrying inside him, and as if he wanted to put a lid over them, he gently laid his hands on Tao’s.

“Really?”

“Yes, really!”

Tao now neither was an object he wanted to fill his own loneliness with, nor a child he had to protect. The reality presenting itself before Feilong’s eyes showed that the time had come to treat him like a man. Tao’s face contorted with joy; as though he were trying to hold back tears, he laughed quietly, “That...That’s nice!”

Now that Tao knew all about his childhood, Feilong would not object anymore either, should he at some point decide to join the Baishe. How could he have countered someone who had decided of his own free will to take the same path as him? It seemed there was no option left but to walk through the dreary darkness together.

“I’m going to get stronger for you!” said Tao in a shaky voice. It sounded like a prayer to himself.

Feilong’s heart involuntarily leapt in his chest when he recognized the manly feature in Tao’s face which contained child and man in unbalanced proportions. He wondered since when Tao was able to make such a face.

Tao took Feilong’s hand reverently and deliberately kissed its back. Of course Tao knew of this ritual gesture which was often exercised in the Baishe. In contrast to his light kiss, the vow was very grave. Feilong looked at him in silence.

So he wants to become stronger... for me...

Those words weighed heavily on his heart.

It was Tao who had taken the most damage from this dispute. Yet he did not show it, but instead tried to cope with it alone, locking the sorrows away in his little heart. Feilong could not ask of him to forgive him for having issued the

order to kill Yan Tsui on top of that. For his young age, Feilong had already burdened him with too heavy a destiny, a heavy destiny which Feilong had to bear as well. He would protect Tao's life as penance for killing his father. As Tao's kinsman, and as someone who had already had to live through the same misery once before, he imprinted all this on his memory.

"That sounds promising, Tao!"

Feilong directed his gaze to Tao's hand. Eventually, the day would come when these hands that were learning the art of tea to make Feilong happy would kill people. Eventually, it would become a matter of course for him to take up a weapon and spill blood in order to reach his aim. That was Feilong's path, and someday it would possibly be Tao's path as well.

"How about another cup?" Yoh interrupted the two of them. But for whatever reason, Tao silently averted his face and ignored him, his eyes stubbornly directed at the floor.

This distinct attitude left behind an awkward feeling. But Yoh, whom the gesture was meant for, did not seem to be especially bothered by it. He asked Feilong if he wanted another cup, whereupon Feilong nodded, even though Tao's behavior worried him a little. The lid of the gaiwan was removed. In the soft sunlight which was shed on the table, the clear water was glowing golden. The reflected light shone on Yoh's hair and lit up his left eye, which was hidden behind strands of hair; the dark iris was gleaming in the bright light, tinting it in the shade of the yellow tea. Feilong regarded this sight as though it were something wondrous. In the meantime, he noticed how Tao's hand quickly moved away from his.



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Stigma in the Finder IV (Finder no Rakuin)

The day to return to Hong Kong had arrived.

Feilong had informed only a few of his subordinates where he was staying, but he could hardly leave the headquarters in Hong Kong unsupervised any longer. Yoh declared himself the escort and came along to the airport to see Feilong and Tao off, who were setting off for home. Even if Feilong was wearing sunglasses and nondescript clothes, he could not conceal his long hair and his beauty with it.

Both of them checked in. While they were waiting for the announcement proclaiming the start of the boarding, Tao asked with a somewhat confused expression, “And what about you, Yoh? Aren’t you coming back with us?”

“That...”

It was understandable that he found it puzzling – no one had told him about Yoh’s treacherous deed. Tao did not know that Yoh, who had coaxed the hiding place of the key out of him with honeyed words when Tao had been in the hospital – the key for the bank safe in which the deeds to the casino were kept – had actually used it and passed the content of the safe on to Asami. If he should ever learn what had happened after that, he would surely feel responsible; hence, when the documents had been back in Feilong’s lawful possession, he had ordered his underlings not to tell Tao anything about it. But before Feilong could respond in any way, Yoh beat him to it. “I... still have work to do here.”

“Oh! I understand...”

Was Feilong mistaken, or did he see a slight touch of relief in Tao’s face besides a regretful expression? But then, as if Tao had realized what kind of impression he was making, his shoulders slumped. One of his good traits was that he was always full of energy; however, since he had arrived in Taiwan, he had grown very reflective at times. That he was keeping a strange distance to Yoh would not have been imaginable before either. Although Tao was gradually recovering, he was far from having processed everything that had happened.

“We still have a little time, Tao! You can go ahead and look around a bit,” Feilong invited him.

“May I, Master Fei?!” All of a sudden, Tao’s face was cheerful again. Certainly the sight of the airport was something special for him, since he rarely got the chance to travel abroad otherwise, and on the way here, he had most likely been so occupied with not losing sight of Feilong that he had not been able to examine his surroundings at all.

Feilong nodded to him. “But stay close by so I’ll find you again!”

“Yes!”

Smiling, Feilong looked after him as he went to the kiosk with lively steps. Although it would have been a lie to say that it did not worry Feilong, in this crowd of people it definitely was not all that dangerous, and Tao was not a careless child anymore. There was no one here who could have endangered him, either. Due to the whole issue, Tao had found out the secret of his roots, thus he was no longer the poor orphan of whom no one knew where he came from. He clearly had both the right to stand by Feilong’s side and to be treated well.

Only when Tao disappeared did Feilong slowly begin to speak. “Yoh...”

He did not answer but approached in silence. Feilong stood with his back to him and spoke in a quiet, low voice. “When you have finished your job... would you come back to Hong Kong?”

No reply.

His nerves were so taut that he believed he heard his own heartbeat, even with the high noise level around him. This time, Yoh should not come to Hong Kong as Asami’s spy but as Feilong’s loyal subordinate. The silence continued. Many thoughts swirled through Feilong’s head. Then, after some time, Yoh’s answer came.

“No.”

Thundering waves crashed through Feilong’s heart and died away again. He dropped his gaze and smiled. “I see.”

He was amazed himself that he did not feel regret. On the contrary, he now

looked up at Yoh lightheartedly. Yoh distantly returned his look. A harmonious tranquility was flowing through the two of them while they were gazing at each other. If it was Yoh's decision not to be under anyone's command and live alone, then it had to be respected. Now that he had left the organization, he was free, and no one would be able to bind his heart in the future. That held true for the Baishe as well as Asami.

"Master Fei!"

Tao's cheery voice caused them to break eye contact. He came running at a jaunty pace, but then came to a stop – he had probably sensed the special atmosphere between them. He said warily, "Is something wrong, Master Fei?"

"Nothing, really! We only talked a little."

"Okay...?"

Tao retreated. It looked as if he only partly believed Feilong's reply. Feilong let his eyes wander over his watch; the boarding was imminent. Tao reluctantly posed a question to Yoh. "Yoh, I'm going to see you again, aren't I?"

"Not right away," he responded.

"For how long? Till your wound is healed?"

"I don't know. But sometime we'll surely see each other."

Tao realized that Yoh's nebulous answers were merely empty phrases. He made an impenetrable face and fell silent. A moment later, he raised his head determinedly. "Yoh, give me your hand... Come on!"

The boy put his hand in his pocket and pulled something out of it, then he placed it on the palm of Yoh's hand. "For you!"

It was a small dark purple purse made of felt.

"Bought it just now!"

Astonished, Yoh opened the pouch, and out of it fell a vivid bright green sculpture. The lovely looking jade tiger was a charm against misfortune.

"Thank you, Tao!" Yoh was smiling from ear to ear. He carefully put the talisman, in which Tao's wish that Yoh may not get hurt again was hidden, away

into his pocket.

Tao was watching with mixed feelings. Then he took a deep breath and said, "While you're gone, I'm going to protect Master Feilong!"

Yoh's eyes widened in surprise, but immediately afterwards a solemn nod followed. "I'm counting on you!"

"When we see each other next time, I'm gonna be much stronger than now, and maybe I'll be taller than you, Yoh!"

Tao hurled those fiery words at him passionately, but his eyes seemed to be moist. Aloof and in silence, Feilong was listening to the verbal exchange between the two.

"I mean it! I'm having a real growth spurt at the moment!"

Without commenting, Yoh looked down at Tao with a quiet smile.

"So... So you better not wait too long till you come back, or soon there won't be any work left for you!"

Yoh could have answered with a joke, but he remained silent. Feilong could not help but sigh when he saw his attitude, which showed that he never wanted to lie to Tao again.

"Tao, it's time we got going."

Feilong beckoned him over for departure and then directed his gaze at Yoh, who took the eye contact as occasion to say, "Take care. And..."

The following words were drowned out by the airport announcement. Yoh shrugged at this unfortunate timing. Feilong considered waiting, but it did not look as though Yoh was going to repeat himself; he only stood there in silence. If he had decided what he had wanted to say was not important, it probably would have been tactless of Feilong to press him.

"You take care as well..." With those words, Feilong tried to tear himself away. They did not have any kind of connection which had to be mourned for after a farewell. He locked the pale memory of last night deep inside his heart and turned away.

When he had taken the first step, Tao's lively voice sounded. "See you, Yoh!"

Feilong walked over to the gate with Tao by his side, convinced that it was the right decision. Even if their ways parted now, there would certainly be a 'sometime'.

Then, they would surely be able to walk hand in hand again.



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Stigma in the Finder V (Finder no Rakuin)

The room was filled with the smell of blood.

“You damn rat!”

Yan Tsui was kneeling on the floor. He was looking up at Yoh, his face wax pale; his groin, which he was pressing a hand on, was colored in bright red, and the blood was dripping onto the uneven ground. Several weeks had passed since the assault on the storehouse at the docks. Yan Tsui had hidden away in another quarter in the city of Taipei – as he had lost loyal subordinates during the dispute at the warehouse, he had probably planned to re-establish his organization in this quarter. But as it appeared, there were not all that many who wanted to be at the command of a drug addict, for when Yoh had entered the room, Yan Tsui had been alone.

“W...Wait! Please wait!”

Yoh wondered whether Yan Tsui was tottering because of his fear or due to the recently injected heroin. He wordlessly pointed the muzzle of his gun at Yan Tsui, who was struggling in the sea of blood. He gulped anxiously, and his face went tense. Yoh had not shot him right away – he did not want to make dying this easy for him. This tremendously vile man should experience as much anguish as he had inflicted on Feilong.

“Y...You’re not under Fei’s orders anymore, right? Wouldn’t you like to join me? The Russian mafia is backing me up! So I can promise you quite a few benefits out of i...”

It was pathetic to watch how Yan Tsui begged for his life. Without saying another word, Yoh shot him through the forehead. Together with the muted bang, blood splattered. In the hand of the dead man, which was lying outstretched on the floor as though it wanted to plead for help, was an injection syringe with a broken needle. Yoh coldly looked down at the miserably deceased body of the man.

“If I can brighten your gloomy mood with this even a little...”

Feilong's order had been to eliminate his brother, Yan Tsui, and Yoh had read in his face that it had not been easy for him to say those words.

"You made the right decision."

As long as Yan Tsui was alive, he would have continued to stoke up the embers of the Baishe – as its boss, Feilong had chosen the right way. Even if it made him a coldhearted man, he had exterminated that which had endangered him without letting himself be deterred by his feelings. He had made the choice that was necessary to protect those who were important to him. And not only for him but for Yan Tsui as well, this had certainly been the best solution, as he had escaped into drug addiction, which had caused his body and soul to fall sick and decay. A recovery from that would not have been possible anymore, and at some point, the Russian mafia would have bled him dry anyway. It had been his fate to fall as far from grace as one could fall and eventually die a wretched death. Bearing that in mind, it was better for him too to have been murdered as head of the Taiwanese mafia.

"I have completed the mission."

He verified Yan Tsui's passing and went away. There was no reason to stay any longer, now that he had done his job. He covered all tracks and left the place at a swift pace. It could be assumed that in the underworld, Yan Tsui's death would be shelved as a not uncommon internal conflict of a mafia organization, without the affair being mentioned in the news. Soon, Feilong would indubitably be informed about the circumstances. In China, where the teachings of Confucius had strong roots, great value was placed on connections with siblings and blood relationship. Even if Feilong had not done it himself, the guilt of fratricide would burden his heart. Yet now that he had settled up with his past, he would continue to stand at the top of the Hong Kong mafia world; it was needless to always pay attention to the blood flowing at his feet. He only had to watch out that no one pulled the rug from under his feet with the excuse that he tried to forcibly dispose of everything and everyone obstructing his way. What Yoh had done for him was nothing more than kick a small stone away from in front of his feet before Feilong tripped over it.

"Sometime again... was it..."

In Yoh's mind, Tao's determined face appeared. When he stepped outside, he looked up into the cloudless sky and blinked against the sunbeams coming from the south. In those endless expanses of the sky, a singular contrail was visible, heading far into the distance and leading towards Hong Kong.

Even if they should meet again someday, he would not be the one by Feilong's side. He did not have any foolish expectations. Even if he was not serving at his side anymore, or precisely because he was an outsider, he had taken up a gain- and loss-free position in Feilong's heart. It was enough for him to have been a comfort for Feilong, who was surrounded by cruelty at all times, although it had only been for a short moment. He sealed away the memory of the seemingly chiseled smooth skin, and of the soft moans. Even if he were never to see him again, he did not regret the path he had chosen.

"It seems to me that you live longer when you have something you cherish."



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Stigma in the Finder VI (Finder no Rakuin)

A few weeks later.

Feilong had settled back well into his everyday life in Hong Kong when he received an unexpected phone call from Mikhail.

Because of the property right for the casino in Macau, their relationship was still strained. Feilong was just taking a bath when the call came in. He answered the phone, but stayed in the marble bathtub. While enduring the joking salutory pleasantries that could be understood as flirtation or as mockery, a certain premonition caused his heart to tremble.

“That reminds me... I’ve heard of a most interesting rumor in Taiwan.” And as expected, Mikhail broached this serious subject after his jesting words, making it sound like it had only just occurred to him. “The aspiring head of a mafia organization was murdered, which shattered the group.”

“Oh, really? That’s news to me...” Feilong looked at the ceiling, which was barely discernible through the white steam, and listened very intently. Yoh had probably fulfilled his task. Even though Feilong had not expected any less from him, his heart suddenly became heavy.

Yan Tsui...

Mikhail, too, did not seem to have any interest in the organization anymore without Yan Tsui. Since it had now lost its most powerful cornerstone, the remaining group was only left with the way of ruin. After Mikhail told him about it in a quite playful tone, a pointed, sarcastic remark followed. “Such irony, don’t you think? You, who doesn’t have one drop of Liu blood inside him, are now standing at the top of the Baishe and have killed your brother, who technically should have been the legitimate successor.”

“What are you talking about?” Feilong slowly lifted his head. A faint gurgle sounded.

One could hear how the mafioso with the name of an angel laughed quietly at the other end of the phone. “Stop pretending now! That wasn’t supposed to be

an offense. Even if you want to keep this case away from yourself under any circumstances, I know very well that this carries your thumbprint.”

Mikhail likely had hoped the brothers would start a magnificent vendetta. His shameless manner of speaking allowed the conclusion that Yan Tsui’s death was no particularly hard blow for him. Had Yan Tsui, who had been his underling, managed his comeback in the Baishe, Mikhail could have brought the entire mafia world of Hong Kong under his control. It was the same aim that Asami had also pursued back then, seven years ago. And even if it had not come that far, it would have led to friction within the Baishe if people had learned that Yan Tsui was still alive. It was not rare that the foolish boss of such an extensive organization who had been expelled from his place in the past used the favor of the moment to be rehabilitated. Had conflicts arisen in the Baishe, it would have weakened Feilong’s power without a doubt. No matter how the situation would have evolved, it would have been an advantage for Mikhail. So one could say that this time, Feilong had gotten ahead of the plans of the Russian mafia, who had pulled the strings behind the scenes of the commotion regarding the rights of ownership.

Mikhail Arbatov... While his name went through Feilong’s mind, he remembered his beautiful face with the blond hair and blue eyes. Although he shared his name with an angel, he was as cunning as a devil. His hedonistic talk and conduct were very striking, but he was hard to figure out, as he did not let himself be swayed by his emotions and at the same time had the nerve to directly invade hostile territory if he could profit from it.

“What a shame for you that I crashed your plans.”

“And how! Your subordinates really seem to respect you a lot.” Mikhail did not make any effort at all to hide that Yan Tsui had only found out so quickly that Feilong was in Taiwan due to his help – he had intended from the start to make Yan Tsui do his bidding by means of drugs to then throw him away. This shamelessness astonished Feilong instead of shocking him.

One has to be wary of him... he thought. Maybe it had been Mikhail’s plan to undermine Feilong, or he had meant to capitalize on the disturbances to implement another villainous scheme. However it was construed, what was clear was that he had abused Feilong’s brother for it; Yan Tsui was Mikhail’s victim

and left a deep wound in Feilong's and Tao's hearts. The price they had been forced to pay was so high that anger arose inside Feilong again.

"Someday you will regret this, Mikhail!"

"We'll see! Your dear brother was an eyesore to you anyway, so it was just the right thing that you got a reason to eliminate him, wasn't it?"

It irritated Feilong that it sounded like Mikhail wanted thanks for giving him occasion to murder his brother, and he chose his inflection so that it had to rub Feilong the wrong way, which seemed to amuse him on top of that. Feilong closed his eyes. A brilliant smile played around his lips. "That's just like you."

The water which he had scooped with the palm of his hand dripped through his fingers. The drops splashed on the water surface, the noise echoing through the bath. His unconcerned tone of voice, which made it sound like it was an unimportant matter they were discussing, made Mikhail notice that he was different than usual.

"Well, well, that sounds as if you've changed?" The laughter disappeared from Mikhail's voice.

"Did it sound like that to you? Maybe the blood went to my head in the warm water. In any case, I shall return your kindness regarding that matter."

And so, the conversation came to a very one-sided end.

Feilong hung up and rose, the water drops running down his body. He combed his hair that was sticking to his skin now, and left the glazed, spacious bathroom. He wiped off the drops and slipped on a bathrobe over his damp skin. As though he wanted to blow away the emotions that had gotten to his head, he exhaled deeply.

He did not have to agonize over the soul of a dead person any longer. He was not imprisoned by the past anymore. However, if someone were to ask him whether it had been the right thing, he would forever remain uncertain. He constantly mulled it over again but did not find a way that would have ended it differently. He knew that he bore the responsibility for all of this, and yet he sometimes wished for nothing more than someone who just gave him reassurance. Asami did not have to rub it in his face – he knew himself that it

was immature behavior. Feilong had probably lost his temper back then because Asami had hit bullseye.

“Master Fei?”

A soft, concerned voice sounded, and he raised his eyes.

“Master Fei, are you not feeling well?”

Tao was standing beside the door; it seemed he had waited to attend to Feilong, like always after the bath. There he was, with a thick towel and a comb.

“Everything is fine, Tao!”

Until some time ago, Tao would have immediately run over to him, but when their gazes met, he lowered his head. Through the hair, one could see his eyes clouded with emotion.

“Tao?”

Since their return from Taiwan, this reaction had become quite frequent. At the call of his master, he slowly lifted his head.

“What’s the matter? Do you perhaps have a fever, Tao?” Feilong laid the back of his hand on Tao’s flushed cheeks.

Tao’s body cringed and tensed as if electricity were flowing through him, and he backed away. “I...I’m fine! Please!”

A little flustered, he eventually started moving stiffly and shifted the chair back from the mirror table. The place where Feilong’s hand had touched him had grown hot and damp with sweat, but this heat was ignited on the inside and different from the feverish temperature of a child. As though nothing had happened, Feilong closed his robe and sat down on the elegantly shaped chair, and Tao diligently began combing his hair, which had soaked up the steam. Since they had used to have little conversations during this ritual in the past, it did not escape Feilong’s attention that Tao was trying to avoid his eye. Maybe Feilong made him feel pensive for some reason. Tao was desperately trying to focus on his task. Feilong was a little clueless as to how he should deal with his unusual behavior, which had been so different before the journey to Taiwan – every time he noticed it anew, he was unable to suppress his confusion. He could not

imagine that Yan Tsui alone was a decisive factor for Tao's demeanor to this extent, but he could not think of another reason.

Should I tell Tao about Yan Tsui's death? he pondered. For a second he thought that the conversation between him and Mikhail could have been heard from outside, but even if that had not been the case, he could not keep it a secret from Tao that Yan Tsui was dead. He was his biological father after all. Should he attempt to withhold this information, Tao would learn it from someone sooner or later, and although Feilong had not done it himself, he was still strongly involved in Yan Tsui's death, so before Tao learned it from the rumor mill, it was better if he heard it from his own lips. He made up his mind and began to speak, "Tao, I have to tell you something."

Tao's combing hand stopped. Feilong wanted to use that in order to get everything out in one go. "Surely you remember Yan Tsui, whom we met in Taiwan. Last week, he pass..."

"Master Feilong!"

It was unusual for Tao to interrupt him so rudely. Feilong raised his head, and through the mirror, Tao's resolute eyes met his.

"For me, there's only you! Only you, Master Feilong!"

"Tao..." Feilong believed he briefly saw the features of his brother flashing across Tao's face, which looked more mature than it had heretofore.

"Your hair is really beautiful..."

Feilong remembered how Yan Tsui had stroked his hair lovingly because he regretted cutting it. Would Tao also direct the blade of hate at him someday? The scar on his left chest stung, and a piercing pain overcame him. This stigma of sin would haunt him his whole life long.

"Master Fei?"

He looked at the hand which Tao had placed on his shoulder. It had gotten much sturdier and stronger; his fingers were plastered with tape, and at the sight of his blisters that had burst open time and time again, Feilong's heart hurt.

Once back in Hong Kong, Tao had insisted on learning the handling of weapons and martial arts. He felt responsible for having been defenseless in the face of the abduction that had put Feilong in danger and in the course of which he and Yoh had gotten hurt unnecessarily. Now that he was being trained by a master, he was acquiring the basics of jujutsu. Not only that, it seemed to Feilong as though his devotion was even deeper than before, which was probably also attributable to the fact that he carried feelings of guilt he wanted to erase. The emotions emanating from Tao were decreasingly the ones of a child. They were changing and turning into the power of a strong-minded, adult man. It was possibly his way of showing that he did not want to stay the helpless child forever.

“You are important to me, Tao!”

Tao’s voice was husky. “Really?” he laughed, full of joy.

For some time since they had returned to Hong Kong, Feilong had not been able to see this laughing face anymore. But it looked different from before.

“You’re very important to me too, Master Fei! More than anything...”

The warmth of his palm sank through the fabric. Feilong did not know why, but his breathing suddenly was not going that easily anymore, as if invisible silk threads were gradually tightening around his throat. His chest was aching. He laid his hand on Tao’s and took it from his shoulder. “You don’t need to comb my hair anymore. Instead, I would be happy if you prepared some tea.”

“Yes!”

Tao’s smile was stilted, but he nodded obediently and rushed out of the room. Feilong stood up and took a deep breath.

Ever since they were back in Hong Kong, Tao seemed to have grown a bit. What he had said to Yoh at the airport had by no means been an exaggeration – he was close to growing taller than 1.60 meters. Should his process of growth continue to go this well, the day would certainly come when he would be taller than Feilong. Slowly but steadily, Tao’s body became the one of an adult man, and Feilong had a sense that he resembled the young Yan Tsui.

Legitimate successor, was it...

Mikhail's words weighed heavily on Feilong's heart. Now that Yan Tsui was dead, Tao, who had the blood of the Liu family inside him, would succeed the Baishe should something happen to Feilong. He did not want Tao to take the same path as him; however, this wish, which he had carried in his heart for a long time, was about to be extinguished by Tao himself.

Feilong put on his silken Chang Pao and went into his private room, where Tao was laying the tea utensils out ready and heating up the pot. While Feilong was waiting for the tea to steep, he went over to stand at the window side of the room. Tao had chosen the Chang Pao which was reflected in the window. On a black background, a dragon embroidered with golden stitches was visible; it covered the area from the chest up to the shoulder, coiling its golden scales and thus accentuating Feilong's smooth body and limbs. The view of the city from the highrise on the 80th floor was filled with splendor and flawless at night. When looking down at the scenery beneath him like this, he felt as though the world was lying in his hand. But at the same time, this feeling of fulfillment was also accompanied by a strong sense of solitude which threatened to engulf his heart if he was not on his guard.

Was that really what I wanted? he asked himself.

The world will keep turning. And the stronger one wishes for an event never to occur again, the more likely it is that the same result follows. It had been Tao's own decision to stay in this world, and Feilong could not interfere anymore. Imposed kindness and sympathy would fuel doubts. He was aware of that, but each time he sensed the darkness in which Tao was growing up little by little, he shivered. It would take a while until Tao's faltering heart calmed down.

Unconsciously, Feilong lifted his right hand and ran his fingertips over the rim of his mouth, tracing the hot lips on which the memory of Asami had been overwritten.

Yoh... he thought. He had carried out Feilong's mission without objection, as if it were an affirmation that Feilong's decision had been the right one. It stirred him up. On the one hand, he contracted his eyebrows because of Yoh's forward behavior, but on the other hand, the load of his heart became a little lighter through him.

“I let you wait, Master Fei!”

Slowly, Feilong looked over to Tao. The sweet aroma of the tea tickled his nose, and he remembered the short morning the three of them had spent together.

“That’s why I said you’re warmhearted.”

How could Yoh have thought to know Feilong so well? A smile played around his lips.

“Yes, I’m coming!”

Had the wound on his left shoulder healed already?

The
End

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